

A stack of books with a laptop and a pen resting on them. The books are stacked on the left, with a laptop on the right. A pen is resting on the books. The background is a light, textured surface.

STUDY GUIDE

Prepared by **DEREK NEALE**, **BILL GREENWELL** and **LINDA ANDERSON**



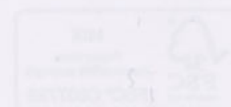
A363 Advanced creative writing



The Open University

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Prepared by
DEREK NEALE, BILL GREENWELL
and **LINDA ANDERSON**





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Welcome to A363

Welcome to A363 *Advanced creative writing*. This Study Guide contains general information about the course and its components, and also provides a week-by-week schedule of work to help you pace your study. It will help you to get started. We advise you to **read this first – in particular the initial ‘Course information’ section** – before all other course materials.

This Study Guide aims to answer any queries you may have about the course – for instance, what topics you will be covering and when; where to get help with technical problems; how to access the website; how you might contribute to the online forums. **You should read it carefully and always keep it at hand so you can refer back to it.**

The detailed schedule of work tells you what you should be doing in any one week of the course, giving you guidance on how much time to spend on activities, which chapters of the Handbook to work on and when to listen and watch the audio-visual items. This will help you to structure a route through the course, to anticipate forthcoming assignments and to integrate writing and reading activities.

At the end of this guide there is a quick reference section, which details the contents of the CDs and DVD, and which also contains a troubleshooting guide, to point you in the right direction when you need assistance with particular problems.

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Course information

Introduction

This course is designed to introduce you to different media, as well as to various writing styles and methods. It offers in-depth tuition and practice in writing fiction, poetry, drama and life writing. The course offers insights into the way different genres interact and in particular how fiction, poetry and life writing can benefit from dramatic methods. You will work through in-depth introductions to stage, radio and film writing, with guidance on professional layouts for different media and detailed advice about adapting your stories for performance. You will then look at how your prose and poetry might benefit from using some of these methods. In developing your writing style and individual voice you will explore the uses of research and look at how the constraints of different forms can enhance your writing.

Aims of the course

By the end of the course you should be able to:

- Write fiction, poetry, life writing and drama with a mature and sophisticated style and a greater awareness of elements such as repetition and analogy.
- Understand more fully the possible relationships between fiction, drama, life writing and poetry.
- Carry out background research for your writing, including the use of information technology.
- Empathise with characters and fully imagine and realise different eras and imaginative worlds in creating new work.
- Understand how dramatic writing methods might be transferable to other genres, for instance, to improve and develop prose style and voice.
- Demonstrate knowledge of dramatic writing, including knowledge of conventional layout for at least one medium.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the strengths and limitations of writing for different dramatic media, and what might be needed to write dramatic adaptations of fiction or life writing.
- Write with a greater awareness of formal constraints.
- Exercise a disciplined practice including willingness to revise and redraft.
- Present manuscripts and media scripts to a professional standard.
- Give objective evaluations of your own and others' work through constructive criticism.
- Produce a piece of writing of substantial length which in its style, complexity and editorial awareness is drafted and redrafted to a high standard.

Many of the skills you will acquire are transferable to other contexts and therefore will be useful to you more broadly, for example in other studies or in employment.

The main transferable skills are:

- Advanced writing skills – including an ability to write with imagination and clarity, and to use fiction, poetic and life writing techniques, and dramatic scripting methods appropriate to a specific medium.
- The abilities to use information technology for research purposes, and to use computer technologies for communication and participation in online forums.
- The ability to analyse and appraise existing texts and emerging texts of a short and of a more sustained length, and to contribute to the development of such work-in-progress.
- The ability to imagine yourself in the place of potential readers, performers, directors or audience members, in order to anticipate the effect of your writing.
- The ability to write according to the specific professional layout and presentation requirements of a particular genre and/or medium.
- The ability to research and write a substantial piece of work through independent study.
- The ability to contribute to group discussions and work as part of a team; to be supportive yet appropriately critical.

The course does not teach basic computing skills, and you are expected to have some degree of familiarity with using computers and the internet.

In particular, you should be:

- comfortable using the Windows environment on a personal computer;
- able to use a web browser to find your way around websites and view specific web pages;
- familiar with using email.

Course components

In addition to this Study Guide, A363 comprises the following items:

- course book: *A Creative Writing Handbook: Developing dramatic technique, individual style and voice*;
- 3 audio CDs;
- 1 DVD;
- Study Calendar;
- Assessment Booklet;
- Online Applications CD-ROM.

Course content and structure

Course book

The core component of the course is the course book, *A Creative Writing Handbook: Developing dramatic technique, individual style and voice*, edited by Derek Neale and co-published by A & C Black. This will be referred to as 'the Handbook' in this guide. The book is divided into four parts:

- Part 1, 'Ways of Writing', explores various kinds of writing, offering different approaches to research, redrafting and investigating the relationship between genres, especially that between drama and fiction.
- Part 2, 'Writing Drama', provides a detailed introduction to writing for stage, radio and film, and focuses in particular on adapting fiction and life writing for these media.
- Part 3, 'Developing Style', investigates how your writing style and individual voice can be improved by looking at elements such as rhetoric, analogy, poetic form, time and theme, as well as the connections between dramatic writing and fiction.
- Part 4, 'Readings', contains examples of writing by established authors in all the genres and for all the media. These are referred to throughout the book. We have deliberately chosen a wide range of readings to show a variety of approaches and styles.

As you work your way through the Handbook you will see that there is an activity connected with every reading, so that your reading becomes a dynamic part of the course, deepening your skills and understanding in a practical way. The Handbook also contains writing activities, which are designed to give you ongoing and progressive practice in the methods we are discussing. Some of these activities can be repeated. For instance, you can return to them in the final part of the course – the period of independent study. The activities will help you to conceive, develop and hone ideas even after you have completed the course.

In addition to forming the main teaching component of A363, the Handbook is intended for a general readership beyond The Open University. Therefore, all information specific to the course is contained in separate items such as this Study Guide and the Assessment Booklet.

Audio CDs

There are three audio CDs which range in length from 65 to 75 minutes:

CD1 *Writing Plays*;

CD2 *Radio, Film and Fiction*;

CD3 *Research, Structure and Style*.

The CDs contain a mix of interviews with leading writers and extracts from drama and radio plays. You might like to listen to them all the way through early on, but you will be directed to listen to specific tracks as you proceed through the course (see the weekly schedules later in this guide). Listening to the items as part of particular discussion topics will help you to make more sense of the performances and what the interviewees are talking about. Some tracks are relevant to more than one part of the course, and you might want to listen to certain interviews and items several times. Returning to authors and performances in this way may be particularly helpful during the period of independent study, when there are no guided, weekly activities.

DVD

There is one 64-minute DVD, *Writing for Stage and Film*, which contains short extracts from selected films and plays that you will be directed to view at specific points in your study. These extracts have been chosen to support particular teaching points, and will mean more in the context of those specific discussions. However, as with the CDs, you may wish to view the DVD right through early on in the course. If you do so, bear in mind that the technical aspects of some items will only be clear to you later, when you encounter them as directed in the schedule. These items were selected not only because of their relevance to particular topics of discussion but also to offer you examples of how a performance might compare with a writer's script.

Study Calendar

A363 has been structured to enable you to pace your study effectively and to a realistic timetable. You should expect to spend approximately 14 hours per week studying the course, although this will vary from person to person and during particular periods of the course.

The Study Calendar gives you an overall timetable for the course, showing you at a glance what you should be reading at any one time, when your tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) and end-of-course assessment (ECA) are due, when you have writing weeks, and so on. For even more detail you should look to the week-by-week schedules in this Study Guide. You will

see from the Study Calendar that the course is divided into four main parts. The first three parallel the first three parts of the Handbook. The fourth is a period of independent study.

You can also see from the Calendar that during Part 3 of the course you will be starting on your ECA work at the same time as completing the taught weeks and final TMAs of the course. You will start this ECA work by writing a proposal for the project and later you will write a first draft. Note that in Part 4 of the course, the period of independent study, there is no guided study. During this period you will be working on drafts of your ECA project and you will be able to review all the course materials – the reading and writing activities in the Handbook, together with the CDs and DVD – as appears appropriate for the writing project you are working on.

Assessment Booklet

There is no written examination for A363. You will be assessed on:

- (a) six tutor-marked assignments (TMAs);
- (b) an end-of-course assessment (ECA).

These two elements (TMAs and ECA) are equally important and therefore weighted 50:50.

Full details of TMA and ECA requirements are given in the Assessment Booklet, which also explains the assessment criteria and marking system. In addition, the Assessment Booklet outlines important information about layout and word counts for your assignments, and reminds you how to write references when you quote from or mention published works in your TMA commentaries.

Online Applications CD-ROM

This CD-ROM includes a number of pieces of software that you may find useful, including the online forum software, as well as a copy of the Open University Computing Guide, which should be your main point of reference for accessing and getting support on OU systems. Basic information from the Computing Guide is reproduced in the booklet included with the CD-ROM. The Computing Guide is also available online: you can access it from your StudentHome page.

What else do you need?

Writer's notebook

If you have studied A215 *Creative writing*, you will know that a notebook is an essential tool for a writer. You will need to use a notebook throughout A363. It can have several functions. Your notebook can be a place where you:

- record observations and overheard conversations;
- record daily events;
- give vent to your enthusiasm, sadness, joy and anger;
- sketch your ideas for poems, plays and stories;
- make notes about research and personal memories;
- keep newspaper clippings, as a source of research or potential ideas;
- record responses to your reading;
- perform writing practice, and try out various techniques;
- collect words and phrases that fascinate you.

Your notebook is essentially yours, and it is the place in which you can gather all sorts of materials – some of which you will use on this course, some of which you might use in years to come. What you collect in your notebook or notebooks will fuel your writing.

What sort of notebook you use, and how you organise it, is up to you. You may prefer lined or unlined, spiral bound or hard cover. The choice is entirely yours. Some writers have different notebooks for different functions – one for collecting observations, a separate one for each individual project, one for daily events. Some writers just use one notebook for everything.

Recommended reference books

You will need a very good, comprehensive dictionary (a shorter or pocket edition won't do) and a clear, easy-to-use grammar book. These are essential tools of the writer's trade. You will have access to online versions of several reference works via the Open University Library, including an online version of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The non-electronic reference volumes we recommend are:

- *The Chambers Dictionary*, Edinburgh: Chambers Harrap (the latest or a fairly recent edition).
- John Peck and Martin Coyle (2005) *The Student's Guide to Writing: Grammar, punctuation and spelling*, 2nd edn, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tuition

Personal tutor

You will be allocated to a tutor, who will contact you at the start of the course and who will lead your online tutor group forum at specific points of the course. Your tutor will mark and give you feedback on your written assignments.

Email and online forums

At the start of the course you will also be assigned to a tutor group, with whom you will be expected to interact via the online forum. (See 'Online forums' below for further details.) Most course-related queries should be sent to your tutor group forum. For instance, if you are having difficulties with the course material at any stage, you should first try posting a message on your tutor group forum. Often you will find that others have similar queries. If you continue to experience difficulty, contact your tutor, who will be able to offer support and advice. Remember that your tutor cannot act as a computer technician for you. Guidance on where to get help with computer problems is available in the Computing Guide (available online from your StudentHome page and also on the Online Applications CD-ROM).

Your tutor is not employed full-time by the OU, and so you should not expect him or her to be available all the time. It is important to establish a preferred contact time with your tutor. Check, for example, if he or she reads emails on specific days. This will give you some idea of when you can expect a response.

Face-to-face tuition

There will be two three-hour tutorials. These will be organised regionally and you will be sent details by your Regional Centre. The first one will take place around the start of Part 2 of the course, giving tutors and students a chance to meet each other fairly early on. This first tutorial will complement the online contact and cover relevant writing topics. For instance, writing drama may be new to many students, so a class discussion of this way of writing would be useful.

The second tutorial will take place during Part 3 of the course. It might focus on developing your writing style and how to handle more than one writing project at the same time.

These tutorials are optional but are likely to be very beneficial for those who can get to them.

Online resources

Course website

You can link to the A363 course website from your StudentHome page.

This website is your online home for everything that relates to studying the course, and is a gateway to several key resources. It provides access to the OU Library, and it provides links to additional electronic resources relevant to particular study weeks. Most of these additional resources are optional, and you should only access them if you are confident that you have enough time to follow them up. We hope you will find them interesting, but they should not divert you from the core activities identified in this Study Guide.

Besides these resources, the A363 website gives you access to the online course forums, where you can talk to other students, and take part in writing workshops.

It will also carry important messages from the course team, so it's a good idea to get into the habit of checking it regularly.

Open University Library website

The OU Library offers a range of useful resources to help you with your studies and in particular your research on A363. Some of these are detailed below. A link to the Library is available from the A363 course website, and contact details are given in the section 'Troubleshooting: where to get help', at the end of this guide.

Online academic resources

The Open University provides a large range of online academic resources via the Library website. These include online reference works, electronic journals, databases containing references to, or summaries of, articles and books, and multimedia collections of still and moving images or sound recordings. The resources we have selected as most relevant to A363 are linked from your course website (in the section 'MyOpenLibrary'), but additional Library resources for creative writing can be found by going to the Library website, selecting 'Your Subject', and choosing 'English' and then 'Creative Writing' from the drop-down menus.

Library passwords

To access the majority of online Library resources you will need only your Open University computer username and password. However, a small number of resources require a specific password. To find a list of these

passwords, go to the Library website, click on 'Help and Support' and then 'Password information'.

Developing your information skills

If you are new to online searching, the information skills tutorial 'Safari' can help you to feel more confident about finding, evaluating and using information. You can test your progress with activities throughout the tutorial. It may be useful to do the 'Info-Rate' questionnaires first. Info-Rate allows you to pinpoint which skills you need to develop and guides you to the relevant sections of Safari for further study. You will find links to both Safari and Info-Rate on the course website.

There is also a Library activity dedicated to A363, which you are advised to do in the first few weeks of the course. The link for this is on the A363 website.

Using other libraries

The majority of university libraries in the UK allow OU students free reference use of their collections and you can search their catalogues online. If the library is a member of the 'SCONUL Access' scheme, you can borrow books free of charge. For more information about joining this scheme, go to the Library website and select 'Libraries near you'. In addition, it is possible to order inter-library loans through your local public library. They will charge a small fee for this service.

Online forums

Different types of online forum are available, all of which you should find useful. But do be aware that some forums are more important than others. A large number of messages will be posted to the forums: you should not feel obliged to read all of them, apart from those from your tutor. Here are the forums available to you:

- 1 A363 tutor group: this forum is run by your tutor, and only your tutor and tutor group have access to it. It will be your main forum for discussion of the course, and related areas of interest and concern. Within this forum you may also be looking at fellow students' writing in online workshops. This should be your most important forum. For TMA 03 you will have to write a critique based on work posted on this forum.
- 2 A national forum where you can discuss the course more informally with all other students taking the course at the same time.

- 3 Various course support forums including A363 FAQ (frequently asked questions).
- 4 Open University forums: there are also forums run by the Open University Students' Association (OUSA).

Contributing to online writing workshops

If you have taken A215 *Creative writing*, you should already have experience of working with online forums, but the information that follows may serve as a helpful reminder. Your tutor group forum is a place where you will be able to discuss writing by fellow members of your tutor group, as well as post your own writing for comment. Some part of this forum might be called an online workshop by your tutor. The way in which work is posted and commented on is a very important aspect of A363. You will note that some TMAs might require you to read and analyse work posted on your tutor group forum.

The potential benefits to be gained from discussing your work online are great. You will learn much from seeing and engaging with the work of other students. In receiving feedback on your own work and offering comments to your fellow writers, your own writing experience will be simultaneously reflected and magnified. You will be able to learn from what others are going through, and your own editing process will be greatly enhanced.

Encountering different points of view about your writing will give you an early idea as to how effective you have been in writing what you intended to write. This in turn will speed up the editorial decision-making process: you will be able to see more readily where things need cutting, parts that are unclear and areas that need development.

There are different ways of running tutor group forums and online workshops. In most cases your tutor will have more involvement at the start of the course, helping you to gain the necessary commenting skills, so that eventually the members of your tutor group will be able to help each other. Your tutor may adopt certain tactics to get everyone involved:

- Time spans might be set for discussion of work.
- Volunteers might be sought to summarise a workshop discussion of fellow writers.
- Your tutor may prevent a writer from contributing to the forum on his or her work until all comments have been received. It is best for the writer and the group if the discussion follows its natural course in finding a consensus about both positive and negative elements within a piece of

work. One way of achieving this is by allowing the author to respond only at the summary stage.

- Your tutor may divide you up into smaller groups. This is so that you don't have to read everyone's work. In this way your workload will be reduced so that you can focus in more detail on a small number of pieces rather than have to read the work of your entire tutor group. But if this is the case you may still have the chance, if you have time, to read (but not comment on) the work and comments submitted to the other groups.
- Your tutor may set specific questions to be answered in the discussion of a piece – for instance, about character or about form. If this is the case, make sure you try to address these questions. However, this doesn't mean you have to keep quiet about an element that strikes you as more important.

Your tutor may use these methods, or deploy a variety of other methods. The important thing is to watch for any instruction from your tutor about how the tutor group forum is going to operate. That way you will know what is going on even if you can't contribute all the time. You will be able to step in and contribute when and if you are able.

Remember, your tutor will not be present on the tutor group forum all of the time. Your tutor may tell you on what days he or she will be present on the forum and available to respond to messages. Also, your tutor may not respond to all messages individually. After a while, if students start to comment appropriately on each other's work, then the forum will become a place where the tutor's role will be to make occasional, overall teaching points in response to a series of messages or pieces of work.

A note on 'powerful' material

In this course you are encouraged to make use of your memory and experience in transformative ways. At times you will also have the option to write directly autobiographical pieces if you wish. It can be exhilarating to delve into personal history but also sometimes uncomfortable when painful memories are resurrected. To write about such memories can have a healing force for the writer, and it can also be moving for, and offer solace to, readers. But remember that the welfare of the writer is always of prior importance. So, if you feel that certain episodes in your life are too harrowing to write about, you should turn to another subject. It would also be sensible not to share writings that are deeply personal in the forum unless you are certain that you will not mind them being discussed impersonally and evaluated as artistic products rather than primarily as slices of your life.

Another form of powerful material is audacious subject matter – for instance, material involving sex, disease or violence. If you use graphic content of a sexual or violent nature in any of your work, make sure it is not gratuitous, i.e. that it is not there just for sensationalist reasons but as a legitimate part of the work. Seek the guidance of your tutor if you are ever in doubt about the appropriateness of posting any particular piece of work on the forum. As a matter of courtesy, if your writing contains graphic material, you should put a content warning in brackets after your subject heading (i.e. ‘explicit content’) so that people can choose whether or not they want to read it.

Commenting on others’ work

Online forums and workshops are usually enjoyable and inspiring, but there are some pitfalls you may be able to avoid by being aware of them from the start. When commenting on others’ work, it is important not to be so worried about getting it wrong or so afraid of hurting the writer that you offer only praise or superficial comments. Be sincere and constructive. Support your fellow students by trying to help their work become the best it can be rather than by protecting their egos in the short term. While being honest, take care not to be dismissive. Even in the rawest of drafts, there may be a glimmer of something that will become good in subsequent drafts. The whole point of a workshop is the discussion of unfinished, sometimes even embryonic work. Everyone will benefit from an atmosphere of trust in the group, where each writer feels secure about presenting rough drafts without fear of putdowns.

Reading can be as intense and passionate an experience as writing. Sometimes fellow writers may explore controversial topics that trespass on your personal values or feelings. Remember that if you feel disturbed by another writer’s work, this may be precisely the kind of response he or she was aiming for. If a piece of writing offends you, you can state this truthfully without blaming the writer and then try to evaluate the piece objectively. For example: ‘I have to say that I found your satirical portrayal of mental illness and its treatment very jarring as it seemed to me to ridicule the patients and showed all of the medical staff as monstrous. But in terms of what you’re trying to do, it is a savage and uncompromising piece.’ However, if you continue to find a piece of writing upsetting and unacceptable, you have the right not to read it and not to comment on it.

Never assume that writings are strictly autobiographical, even if they appear to be so. One of the basic tenets of A363 is that you may draw on your memories and experiences in inventive ways and that you may also write convincingly about things which have never happened directly to

you. It is important not to inhibit each other by asking intrusive questions like 'Do you have a mother-in-law like that?' or 'Were you anorexic, then?'

Here are some guidelines:

- If you think something works well, try to analyse why, but also look for its faults. Usually there will be some.
- If you think something doesn't work, again analyse why. Make sure you look for the parts that might be working better in the piece. Almost always there will be positive things to work on as well.
- Try to go beyond 'Oh, I liked that, but I didn't like that.'
- Always comment on the idea and its implementation, not on the personality of the writer.
- Bear in mind that more often than not you are passing comment on a 'work-in-progress', a piece of writing that is not finished. Try to assess where it might go and what tactics might be used in its development.
- Always try to show evidence for whatever claims you make. Evidence, in this instance, is the part of the writing about which you are talking. Point out the use of language you are talking about so that everyone knows which part you mean.
- Rather than being imperious in your comments, explain what you mean, point out the evidence – but seek the opinion of others, so that the discussion continues. This can be done with little nudging queries: 'What does everyone else think?', or 'I wonder if anyone else thinks this?'
- Always resist the urge for revenge. If you find you disagree strongly with a comment made on your own work, or on that of another member of the tutor group, don't retaliate. Argue the comments through in context, but don't carry the argument into discussions of other pieces where the point has lost its relevance.
- Think about how well the writing is geared to its intended readership.

Receiving comments on your work

Receiving feedback on your work from your tutor and fellow students can be confusing at first. Your impulse may often be to leap in and explain and defend your writing. This impulse is natural but can sabotage the possibility of some really illuminating feedback. Try to be calm and curious and silently eager for all comments, only responding when you have had time to sift and reflect. Everyone loves praise and validation and these can encourage writers tremendously, but so-called 'negative' feedback can occasionally be a great gift too when it mobilises your imagination or offers you some fresh insight into your writing.

It is equally important not to rush into redrafting. Wait and deliberate. Never redraft immediately after getting the first comment on a piece. Welcome everyone's suggestions but don't try to implement all of them. You are not trying to satisfy a tribunal or produce some kind of 'writing by committee'. With practice you will develop two things – an emotional robustness regarding comments on your work and the power to discriminate between suggestions which are useful to you and those which are genuinely wrong-headed or unsuitable.

Here are some guidelines:

- When assessing comments from your group you may wish to rewrite the idea completely. Don't rush into this before the online discussion is finished.
- You may wish to tweak your story or poem a little, rewrite completely or just leave it as it is. Any of these options is possible. There is no correct way of responding to critical comments. You may choose to accept some comments and reject others. Remember: you are the final arbiter; you are the writer.
- Pay special attention to areas where there seems to be a consensus of opinion, even though it might be an opinion with which you strongly disagree. Ask yourself: 'Have I ever had doubts about this before this discussion started?' Be honest with yourself. If the answer is 'Yes', then the area almost certainly needs attention.
- Ask yourself whether the piece under discussion is going to be developed any further. If so, how?
- If it isn't going to be developed, what can be salvaged from it? You might wish to use a character, a metaphor, a line of dialogue. It's important to realise that even if you eventually abandon an idea, there may be some small part of that idea – sometimes just an image, a line or even a phrase– that you can use at a later date, in another piece.
- Remember: your fellow writers are commenting on a piece of work at a particular stage in its development, not on a finished article, and they are certainly not commenting on you personally.

If approached in the right way, sharing your writing online and passing comment online about the work of other students can be the most rewarding of activities. Potentially it can dramatically boost your development as a writer, because, if only temporarily, it drags you out from the necessary isolation that accompanies the act of writing. In those brief illuminating interludes you will gain insights that might otherwise take you months, if not years, of solitary redrafting and editing. It is indeed a rare opportunity, one that should be grasped. After all, it's not every day that

you have guaranteed readers, readers who will pay meticulous attention to detail and who have a mutual interest in offering constructive criticism.

The A363 forums are monitored by someone specifically appointed by the course team to moderate the communication taking place, and so you need to be aware of what constitutes good online behaviour, or what is commonly referred to as 'netiquette'. What follows is a series of extracts adapted from an Open University guide on how to use forums generally as a means of support during the course, how to make the most of discussions and debate, and how to handle particular problems that may arise.

How students can make forums work

Why do courses use online forums?

Feeling part of a community of learners can be particularly difficult for distance learners. If you are working mostly or entirely on your own, it can be hard to stay motivated. In the words of an OU student, discussion via a forum 'takes the distance out of distance learning'. It can make a big difference to know that other people are struggling with the same issues as you, and that you have fought shared 'enemies' (such as software problems, or assignment deadlines). It makes a big difference if you can share your problems and ideas.

Online forums are a relatively new mode of learning, very different from the traditional classroom, and both teachers and students need to learn how to do it successfully. You will encounter all sorts of differences from face-to-face learning; for example, there will be much longer time delays in a discussion, and there will be no non-verbal cues, such as tone of voice or facial expression. Some aspects of these differences will be positive (e.g. you have more time to think about what you want to say) and some will be a nuisance (e.g. it's possible to misinterpret people when you only have their written words).

What can I do to help my forum work?

You can make a big difference to the effectiveness of your forum. There are four main ways that can help to make the forum work well:

1 Get involved and make a commitment

This means contributing regularly, putting in some time and effort, and 'being there' for people: reading and responding to their messages, and giving support where you can.

If you can't be very active on occasion, let people know, e.g. 'Sorry, I can't be around for a while, but I'll do what I can when I get back.'

2 Help people get to know you

This is particularly important in the early stages of a forum. People need to feel that they can trust each other, so as to be able to risk putting forward their ideas or asking silly questions. Be yourself; use examples from your own experience, perhaps share a little about your life outside the course, and write more or less as you speak, rather than very formally, which can be off-putting.

3 Take some responsibility

This is all about paying attention to the process as well as the content; if everyone does this your forum will feel like a community – keeping things going, encouraging others, starting discussions without having to be told to do so, helping to summarise and watching out for people feeling ignored or left out.

4 Construct your messages carefully

If you can write your messages very clearly and make it easy for people to see how they fit into the discussion, then it's more likely that people will read and consider your messages, and everyone will find it easier to follow what's going on.

- Use 'threading' properly. If someone replies to a message, then someone else replies to the reply, and so on, the whole chain of messages is called a thread. If you are introducing a new topic or issue, don't reply to an existing message, but start a new thread instead with a new and relevant subject line.
- Be clear what your point is. A good way to force yourself to be clear is to put a one-sentence summary at the top of a longer message, e.g. 'This message is to explain why ...'. Keep to one subject per message. It's much better to send several messages if you have a number of topics to write about, because people can reply to their preferred topic, and the topics remain in separate threads rather than becoming mixed up and confused.
- Give reasons for your opinions. It's hard to discuss something with someone when they simply state what they think without any justification. Use the word 'because' freely. Examples often help.
- Invite responses to your messages, e.g. 'Do you agree with me here?', or 'Have I left anything out?', or 'What do you think?'

Handling particular problems

When you're involved in online forums you will inevitably meet certain problems that will cause annoyance and frustration, and may well lessen

your motivation to participate. Some of the ways around these problems are suggested here.

I don't know what to say!

It is perfectly possible to learn from what other people say without contributing anything yourself. After all, at a face-to-face tutorial, some people will not say anything, perhaps because they feel shy. Online, you can't see anyone smiling in encouragement, so it can be hard to take the plunge and join in.

The good thing about online discussions is that they generally happen over a period of time, allowing you to think about what you want to say. They also allow for everyone to have their turn, unlike a face-to-face tutorial which can demand a more spontaneous response.

Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- Look for other people's messages that you agree with, and say so, perhaps adding your own examples.
- Look for messages that give you ideas you hadn't thought of, or that set you thinking about something, and let the person know.
- Ask a question about something you don't fully understand, and hopefully someone will help you out. Don't worry about asking 'silly' questions; there will probably be several other people with the same worry, and you will have done them a favour by asking.
- If someone else asks a question you wanted to ask, help them feel less conspicuous by adding that you wanted to know the answer too.
- If someone asks a question about something you have knowledge of, answer it.
- If someone asks a question that you can't help with, but no one seems to be answering, you can at least offer your sympathy and maybe suggest other sources of help.
- Writing your first message may seem awkward, but if you keep on doing it, forums will quickly come to feel quite natural.

Am I saying too much?

Probably not. The people who worry about this are usually the very people who hold a forum together. Don't worry unless:

- over half the messages are from you;
- your messages are mainly offering your opinions rather than engaging in dialogue with others.

If someone is becoming too dominant, others can start to feel that an answer will always be forthcoming, and so won't bother contributing any more. If you think this is happening with you, then maybe you could hold back for a while.

Not everyone is participating

It can be annoying if there are some people in your group who don't participate in the discussions. You may feel that this is unfair, or that you are doing more than your fair share of the work. There are a variety of reasons why some people don't participate in the forum discussions: pressure of personal circumstances, illness, shyness or deliberate decision.

- Do what you can to encourage your other group members to join in, e.g. by private email, and find out when they expect to participate, or whether they have decided not to. Accept their reasons and apologies, and don't pressurise them.
- Try discussing an activity or a topic in a way that will draw others in – the chances are that they're reading the discussions.

I've got behind and there's too much to read

If, for whatever reason, you join a forum later than the other participants, or are unable to be involved for a while, the prospect of joining in can be a bit daunting. There will be lots of messages you haven't read and you may feel that everyone else knows each other. The main thing to remember is that everyone will be pleased that you have joined, and will almost certainly be helpful. Here are some strategies you can use in this situation:

- If you don't have time to read all the messages, don't try. Use the message subjects and senders to decide which to read. Read any introductory messages explaining what the forum is about, and telling you what the group is working on (generally, these will be from the tutor).
- Don't worry too much about discussions or activities which have finished. Maybe read any obvious concluding or summarising messages, but concentrate on the current activities.
- Send a short message announcing your presence and apologising for the delay.
- Just read messages for a little while, so you get the feel of the forum, and understand what's going on.
- If you're not quite sure what has been discussed already, acknowledge this in your messages, e.g. 'My apologies if you've already covered this, but ...'.

Nobody's saying anything

A forum can be quite a fragile thing. If no one says anything for a while, it becomes harder and harder to break the silence, and no one feels like being the first to contribute. Someone needs to be brave and break the silence as soon as they realise what is happening. Here are some suggestions for what you can do:

- Ask a question that prompts a response, e.g. 'Can anyone explain the bit where it says ...?'
- Respond if anyone else tries to break the silence.
- Conspire with someone else to get an argument going – take sides on an issue and debate it vigorously, with appeals to the rest of the group to join each 'side'.
- Start a discussion on something crucial to the course, e.g. how to tackle the next assignment.

In summary, to get the most out of online forums it is best to contribute as much as you are able. This will take time and effort, but you'll find it's worth it. If members of your group help and support each other, you will bring a variety of perspectives to bear and you will be able to challenge and build on each other's ideas. This will make a big difference to your enjoyment and understanding of the course, and perhaps also to your achievement.

Week-by-week study guide

Introduction

The purpose of this part of the guide is to help you to plan your work and manage your time. What follows is a summary of the work involved in each week so that you can see at a glance what you will be doing and which course components you will be using. Each weekly schedule contains checklists of tasks and advice about how to tackle them, along with any necessary reminders or suggestions about TMA or ECA preparation.

If you have previously taken a writing course at the OU (such as A215 *Creative writing* or one of the *Start writing* courses), this weekly schedule will be familiar. The emphasis is on you producing and developing new writing, through guided exercises and assignments. Beware of recycling any of the work you may have written or submitted for courses you have studied in the past – whether at the OU or elsewhere. A363 is designed to help you produce new work and assesses how you develop that work. You will gain the full benefits of the course only if you see this as an opportunity to develop projects and techniques that are generated by the course. If you use old material, you may also fall foul of university regulations. You will find further information about this issue in the Assessment Booklet. If in any doubt consult your tutor.

The weekly guides that follow list estimated times for your course-directed writing and reading activities. We have not suggested timings for your CD listening or DVD watching, the online forums or TMA preparation, all of which will vary from week to week and from person to person. The activity timings are meant to be a rough guide – the amount of time spent will vary according to individual needs and preferences. Writers often become entranced with a particular piece of writing and want to stick with it. If this happens to you, it will usually mean that the course is working. You will be able to develop and deepen such pieces of writing, but you also need to keep the momentum of the course going. Barring holiday weeks, dedicated writing weeks and the period of independent study, you should work through one chapter of the Handbook each week.

Remember that this is a Level 3 course and as such you are expected to undertake any necessary further research in order to develop your writing. You are also expected to organise your own study time. You should look and plan ahead. Over holiday periods check this Study Guide and the Study Calendar and try to anticipate what you will be doing when you resume your studies. If possible, try to get ahead. You should also preview the course activities and schedule your work intelligently. For instance, take an early look at the TMAs to see when they are due and what focused preparation is needed. You can afford to give greater priority on occasions

to some chapters and some activities over others. For instance, in Part 2 of the course, at the end of which you will have to write a script for a particular dramatic medium, try to identify your preferred medium as soon as possible. Don't miss out the chapters and activities in the Handbook relating to the media you aren't working on, but pay greater attention to your chosen medium. You can always return at a later date to activities completed less thoroughly at the first attempt.

So, in Part 3 of the course, for example, you may have decided that you want to write a poetry assignment for TMA 05. You will therefore pay particular attention to the parts of the Handbook and the relevant activities that are devoted to poetry; your work might be especially focused on Chapter 15. But you might be writing fiction for your ECA and therefore could find it helpful to revisit, redo or elaborate upon some of the Part 3 fiction activities during your period of independent study.

We expect students at this level to pick their own individual path through the materials, to devote more time to certain parts of their study and less to other parts. Finding your own route through the course will help you to develop a more personal style and voice in your writing.

You can always return to reading and writing activities, and to audio and visual items. Some of the writing activities have been designed with this in mind. As previously suggested, during the period of independent study, when you are working on your own to develop an extended piece of work for your ECA, it is likely that you will need to revisit certain writing activities – to develop a scenario, to hone a structure, to bring on the voice of a character, or to remind yourself of some of the techniques covered in the course. You will need to do this in order to write accurately in your various assignment commentaries, but especially in the commentary component of the ECA.

Remember that course-directed activities – such as the writing and reading activities – are designed to take up only part of your study time each week. The weekly tuition and writing practice should feed into your own more sustained writings, some of which will become part of your TMAs or final ECA.

The proportions of time spent on course-directed and self-directed writing will vary from person to person. Some students may have a half-and-half balance; others may have 60–40 per cent, or even 70–30 per cent during weeks when other demands become pressing. All of these ratios are fine. Often it will not be possible to see definitely where the two strands of your work divide. The course-directed work will often spark something which you will then take in your own original direction and spend concentrated bursts of time on. This is how it should be.

Part 1 Ways of writing

Week 1 Playing with genre

Themes for the week

- Exploring what genre means in terms of writing style;
- Playing with the effects and styles of different genres;
- Examining the links between fiction and drama;
- Tightening scenes in your fiction to strengthen the pace of storytelling;
- Starting to consider how stories move between genres.

Schedule of work

This week you will investigate genre and its effect on style, in particular the relationship between the genres of fiction and drama. You will focus on trying to use different voices in your fiction, giving various stylistic clues to your reader and dramatising your fiction.

Reading

Chapter 1 of the Handbook, which includes four reading activities:

Activity 1.1

- A passage with several alternative titles – to look at the different suggestions of genre in the style, voice and content of the passage.

Activity 1.3

- Reading 1, the short story 'Violin Lessons' by Derek Neale – to look at the generic elements at work in the narrative and what makes the story dramatic.

Activity 1.4

- Three passages from David Mitchell's novel *Cloud Atlas* – to identify the elements of style or content that appear generic.

Activity 1.7

- Reading 2, the short story 'A Real Durwan' by Jhumpa Lahiri – to look at generic elements but also at the possibility of writing a dramatic adaptation of the story.

Writing

There are two writing activities:

Activity 1.2

- Continuing the passage from the first reading activity, using a chosen title and making the story much longer.

Activity 1.5

- Developing the voice of a new character using some of the stylistic elements seen in one of the passages from *Cloud Atlas* or another genre.

Editing

There is one editing activity:

Activity 1.6

- Rewriting and editing a story to improve the dramatic structure of the scenes and the way they link together.

Activity timings

The following timings are intended as a general guide:

Activity 1.1	Reading	10 minutes
Activity 1.2	Writing	60 minutes
Activity 1.3	Reading	60 minutes
Activity 1.4	Reading	10 minutes
Activity 1.5	Writing	80 minutes
Activity 1.6	Editing	40 minutes
Activity 1.7	Reading	60 minutes

Forum

Here are some suggestions for group discussion:

- Post your thoughts on the passage and various titles in Activity 1.1.
- Post some of your writing prompted by the passage and by Activity 1.5.
- Discuss some of your responses to the two short stories – ‘Violin Lessons’ by Derek Neale and ‘A Real Durwan’ by Jhumpa Lahiri – especially in the context of genre and possible dramatic adaptations.
- Post some of your own examples of genre – favourites and pet hates – together with examples of ‘dramatic fiction’.

TMA and ECA preparation

This week you may find it useful to:

- Look back over how to use freewriting and clusters to generate ideas (Chapter 1 in the A215 Workbook – an electronic version of this book can be found via the A363 website).
- Start a cluster in your notebook to generate possible ideas for your first TMA story or piece of life writing. At the centre of your cluster put an image, word, character or anything else that comes to mind – or alternatively use one of the prompts for TMA 01 in the Assessment Booklet.
- Consider what genre you would like to use for the TMA.

Useful resources

- There is a section on genre and fiction in the A215 Workbook, pp.161–4.
- On the A363 website there is part of an interview with Alan Ayckbourn where he talks about his plays *How the Other Half Loves* and *Absurd Person Singular*, and about the genres of comedy and tragedy.
- Check the A363 website for any useful links and extra items.

Week 2 Conflict and contrast

Themes for the week

- Editing writing to maximise its tension;
- Exploring material for its potential;
- Producing tension by exploring conflict;
- Changing or varying the pace of your writing.

Schedule of work

This week you will explore the potential for creating conflict and contrast by adapting your own writing, or by adapting the work of other writers. You will experiment with as wide a range of types of writing as possible, searching for what gives it dramatic power.

Reading

Chapter 2 of the Handbook, which includes four reading activities:

Activity 2.3

- Carol Ann Duffy's poem 'We Remember Your Childhood Well' – for an example of conflict, as seen from one point of view.

Activity 2.5

- Reading 3, V.S. Pritchett's short story 'The Fly in the Ointment' – to see how a conflict between two characters is sustained and developed.

Activity 2.7

- Readings 4 and 5, from Paul Theroux's *The Kingdom by the Sea*, and from Jonathan Raban's *Coasting* – to see how one incident can be described in two very different ways.

Activity 2.9

- D.H. Lawrence's poem 'Bat' – to see how sound, rhythm and focus can be used to create contrast.

Writing

There are six writing activities:

Activity 2.1

- Writing down a story you have told before, as a prelude to editing it.

Activity 2.2

- Noting points of potential tension in a chosen letter, diary or other document, before going on to write a piece, in prose or poetry, which makes use of some of that potential.

Activity 2.4

- Writing a piece of prose or a poem in which you see a conflict from the viewpoint with which you disagree.

Activity 2.6

- Making notes about two people in rival roles, and going on to write a passage that brings out this rivalry.

Activity 2.8

- Writing two passages in which the original experience (a walk, a journey) has been the same, but the written accounts concentrate on different aspects of it. If the journey isn't feasible for you to undertake, it might be possible to ask two friends to go on a journey, and then to report their experiences back to you separately.

Activity 2.10

- Composing, either in prose or poetry, two passages in which the content is the same, but the mood is different.

You'll notice that the activities often ask you to find material first, or to make notes first, before you start writing. That's an important part of the process.

Editing

There is one editing activity:

Activity 2.1

- Editing a story you have told before, and noting the effects of the rewriting.

Activity timings

The following times are intended as a general guide:

Activity 2.1	Writing and editing	30 minutes
Activity 2.2	Writing	60 minutes
Activity 2.3	Reading	30 minutes
Activity 2.4	Writing	45 minutes
Activity 2.5	Reading	60 minutes
Activity 2.6	Writing	45 minutes
Activity 2.7	Reading	30 minutes
Activity 2.8	Writing	60 minutes
Activity 2.9	Reading	30 minutes
Activity 2.10	Writing	60 minutes

Forum

Here are some suggestions for group discussion:

- Share the process of investigation you used in Activity 2.2, and what kinds of potential you found. Discuss what you found surprising.
- Suggest forms of rivalry other than those given in Activity 2.6, and share ideas about their potential.
- Discuss with your group the process of rewriting and reshaping in Activity 2.10.

TMA and ECA preparation

This week you may find it useful to:

- Continue to refine and to develop your ideas for TMA 01, considering whether any initial suggestions you have made in your notebook contain the strength that comes from contrast and conflict.
- Decide whether your TMA will be life writing or fiction, and what kinds of situation or characters you will be exploring.

Useful resources

- A major theme of both Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 is that there is potential in all sorts of unlikely source material, as with the private letter from uncle to nephew reproduced in Chapter 2 of the Handbook. It is worth reading through any private letters in your own possession, or through published collections of letters, to see what you can find.
- Looking through the letters columns of newspapers can also be fruitful, if you are looking for examples of conflict. Most major national and international newspapers now have an online archive, and many public libraries also still carry micro-fiche archives of *The Times*, with a printed index.
- There is a section which deals with conflict in the A215 Workbook, p.75.
- Check the A363 website for any useful links and extra items.

Week 3 Vision and revision

Themes for the week

- Considering primary and secondary sources for research;
- Exploring material for its potential;
- Undertaking research as a basis for writing;
- Editing material during adaptation from source information;
- Making the most of a writer's notebook;
- Understanding the potential of writing through rewriting.

Schedule of work

This week you are building on the process of rewriting explored in Chapter 2, by developing research skills, and by editing your own material and existing material to consider such issues as economy, pace and focus.

Reading

Chapter 3 of the Handbook, which includes four reading activities:

Activity 3.2

- Reading 6, from Sarah Waters's novel *The Night Watch* – to consider the use of period detail.

Activity 3.3

- Reading 7, from Liz Jensen's novel *War Crimes for the Home* – to consider what kind of research would have been undertaken.

Activity 3.5

- Readings 8 and 9, from *Nella Last's War* and from Victoria Wood's *Housewife*, 49, a television adaptation of Nella Last's diary – to consider what Wood has retained, and what she has omitted.

Activity 3.8

- Readings 10 and 11, from Sylvia Plath's journals and her poem 'The Bee Meeting' – to consider how source material might be adapted.

Writing

There are three writing activities:

Activity 3.4

- Using what you discover during research to begin a piece of writing of your own.

Activity 3.6

- Finding some memoirs or autobiography to use as source material, and noting what you would keep, and what you would omit.

Activity 3.7

- Rewriting material from an existing source, and then rewriting your own revision without reference to the original source.

Research

There are two research activities:

Activity 3.1

- Finding material about a real-life event, researching it, and going on to research material you would need if the event had taken place at least fifty years earlier.

Activity 3.4

- Finding information from a variety of sources.

When you are undertaking these activities, you will undoubtedly find some material which is not of immediate use. Don't throw the material away. Hold on to it – keep it filed, or keep a note of what drew you to it. Often you may find that material you collected months and even years earlier is suddenly useful to you. You are also likely to find that one piece of research triggers another. Make sure that research – pleasurable in itself – does not actually stop you writing. But equally, let your imagination direct your research, and if your research is actually beginning to change the subject of your writing, consider allowing it to do so. Research can generate new ideas as well as assist with existing ones.

Activity timings

The following times are intended as a general guide:

Activity 3.1	Research	60 minutes
Activity 3.2	Reading	20 minutes
Activity 3.3	Reading	25 minutes
Activity 3.4	Research and writing	120 minutes
Activity 3.5	Reading	70 minutes
Activity 3.6	Writing	60 minutes
Activity 3.7	Writing	60 minutes
Activity 3.8	Reading	45 minutes

Listening

CD3 *Research, Structure and Style*, Tracks 2, 3 and 4: Mass-Observation archivist Dorothy Sheridan and novelist Liz Jensen talking to Bill Greenwell about editing original manuscripts; about the uses to which creative writers might put archive material; and about researching Second World War slang.

Questions to think about while you listen

- What does Dorothy Sheridan say about stories standing on their own and diaries becoming poetic?
- She talks about diaries often being 'very boring'. What kinds of details do you think she is referring to?
- She also talks about how the archive material can give readers a heightened 'awareness of their own language and slang'. What kinds of language and slang do you use? What kinds of slang for the same experience do younger or older people of your acquaintance use?
- Liz Jensen talks about the ways she set about researching a Second World War context. How did she research the language?

You will be doing more work on research in Weeks 5–10, when you will see that Tanika Gupta and David Edgar make particular reference to it on CD1 *Writing Plays*, Tracks 2 and 8. Edgar, for instance, refers to writing that is 'overwhelmed' by research.

Background information

Liz Jensen was born in 1959. She worked initially as a journalist, and as a radio producer. She has had six novels published, all by Bloomsbury – *Egg Dancing* (1995), *Ark Baby* (1998), *The Paper Eater* (2000), *War Crimes for*

the Home (2002), *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax* (2004) and *My Dirty Little Book of Stolen Time* (2006). Her novels, which have been shortlisted and longlisted for major awards, have strong scientific themes, and she frequently chooses highly unusual narrators. In *The Ninth Life of Louis Drax*, for instance, one of the main voices is that of a nine-year-old boy in a coma.

An extract from *My Dirty Little Book of Stolen Time* is used in Chapter 13, and *Ark Baby* is touched on in Chapter 17.

Dorothy Sheridan was born in 1948. She began working with the Mass-Observation project in 1974, and has gone on to become Head of Special Collections (which includes the Mass-Observation archive) at the University of Sussex. Among her publications are *Among You Taking Notes* (1985), an edition of writer Naomi Mitchison's wartime diary, the anthology *Wartime Women* (1990) and a series of other Mass-Observation anthologies and studies. For her work, she was awarded an MBE, and, in 2007, an honorary doctorate by The Open University.

Mass-Observation began as an anthropological study of the British, instigated by Tom Harrisson, Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings in 1937. It collected diaries and other written responses to questionnaires from volunteers, and kept going until 1949 (although there is some material from the 1950s and 1960s). Extracts were published in hundreds of pamphlets, the writers remaining anonymous. In 1981, the project was revived. There have been over fifty publications of diaries and anthologies of material from the Mass-Observation archives, including *Nella Last's War*, first published in 1981 (after being considered as the basis for a television drama documentary by Richard Broad). Among these are Simon Garfield's three anthologies of life in wartime and post-war Britain, *Our Hidden Lives*, *Private Battles* and *We Are At War*. *Our Hidden Lives* was adapted for television by the BBC. The publicity given to Nella Last's diaries by Victoria Wood's *Housewife, 49* has led to a further edition of Last's diaries being prepared.

Viewing

DVD *Writing for Stage and Film*, Clip 1: *Housewife, 49* – to look at the way original material can be edited and adapted. The script of the passage is given in the Handbook (Reading 9).

Questions to think about while you watch

- What do you notice in the performance that differs from the script?
- How does the script create tension?

Forum

Here are some suggestions for group discussion:

- Share information about any writing, in any genre, that you have recently encountered, and speculate on what kind of research might have been needed, and whether any research is noted at the end of the text.
- Have a look at the Mass-Observation materials available online through the OU Library, and bring any interesting material to the notice of your group.
- Post extracts on the forum of any revisions you made during Activity 3.7, and discuss whether or not you should ‘murder your darlings’.

TMA and ECA preparation

This week you may find it useful to:

- Check your ideas for TMA 01 against the requirements given in the Assessment Booklet. Do some background research into your subject, whether it is fiction or life writing.
- Undertake your first draft for TMA 01, deciding whether to use one of the prompts or to devise your own subject. Make notes on it as you go. Aim to have the draft in an appropriate state of preparation for the writing week that follows.

Useful resources

- The OU Library has online access to the images of diaries and other writings so far digitised by Mass-Observation. Search for ‘Mass-Observation online [electronic resource]: British social history, 1937–1972, from the University of Sussex’. Look in the section marked ‘Contents’ (a tab at the top of the page). This will show you (among other headings) ‘Diaries, 1939–1940’. The Mass-Observation participants are known by number.
- On the A363 website, you can hear Sarah Waters talking about *The Night Watch*, and about her research. You can also hear Liz Jensen reading the passage from *War Crimes for the Home* which is quoted in the Handbook (Reading 7).
- There is a section on research in the A215 Workbook, pp.66–8, and again on p.326.
- Check the A363 website for any useful links and extra items.

Week 4 Writing week

Schedule of work

This week is devoted to writing your TMA 01.

There is no Handbook chapter and there are no guided reading or writing activities for this week, though you might like to review Part 1 (Chapters 1–3 of the Handbook and associated readings), for any elements that seem pertinent to your TMA. Look back over things that you are uncertain about or that particularly interest you.

Review all the relevant audio CD tracks and the DVD film clip you have looked at so far.

TMA and ECA preparation

Make sure that your subject suits the given length of the writing you are asked to complete, whether it is a short piece of fiction or a short section of life writing. You have to ensure that the piece, which must be a self-contained episode or story, does not abound in characters, locations and events, or it is likely that your writing will compress too much information. Whether you are writing fiction or life writing, you will need to have a clear focus on an incident or key event. To make your piece stand alone, you will need to give it a sharp sense of definition. The word limit should be a powerful influence on the shape and structure.

When you are reviewing your writing, think about the advice given in the first three chapters about how fundamental character, setting and action are, and also about the need for momentum, the importance of voice, the power of contrast and conflict, and the power of research and revision.

You may find that you have additional ideas. Make sure you keep them: they may be useful in later TMAs, or the ECA.

If you didn't manage to get a draft of your work completed in Week 3, finish it early on this week and put it to one side while you get on with your commentary.

For the commentary, look back through your writer's notebook from Activity 1.1 onwards, looking for comment and discussion on how you have fared when using certain techniques, what you noticed about certain extracts you have read during this part of the course, and any discussions you may have had on the forum. Leave your commentary for a little while, in the same way that you leave your story – then return to each in turn, and edit, making sure your main piece is sharpened, corrected and presented well.

Part 2 Writing drama

Week 5 Writing stage plays

Themes for the week

- Creating dramatic conflict through contrasts;
- Writing stage dialogue using idiom and idiolect;
- Using correct layout for stage plays;
- Considering the dangers of overwriting;
- Overhearing conversations;
- Working on the pace and rhythm of dialogue;
- Considering adapting a story for the stage.

Schedule of work

This week you will focus on creating conflict through contrast in your play scripts. You will look at how to use idiom and idiolect in the dialogue of your stage characters, and you will also consider the pace and rhythm of your dialogue, as well as investigating methods for laying out stage scripts.

Reading

Chapter 4 of the Handbook, which includes two reading activities:

Activity 4.2

- A stage adaptation of part of 'Violin Lessons'. This is the short story discussed in Chapter 1 (Reading 1), and it would be useful to reread it with this script – to look at how you go about writing a stage adaptation, picking which elements to include and which new parts to invent.

Activity 4.3

- Reading 12, from Tanika Gupta's play *Sanctuary* – to look at the way the voices of the characters contrast with one another and make use of idiomatic features.

Writing

There are two writing activities:

Activity 4.4

- Writing a one-page script using at least two distinct voices, one of which reveals a particular idiom or dialect.

Activity 4.5

- Developing the voices of two characters from overheard conversations.

Research

There are two research activities:

Activity 4.1

- Viewing or listening to three minutes of drama and identifying the features that create contrast and conflict.

Activity 4.5

- Listening to overheard conversations, different idioms and repeated phrases or words in individual speech patterns.

Activity timings

The following timings are intended as a general guide:

Activity 4.1	Research	20 minutes
Activity 4.2	Reading	45 minutes
Activity 4.3	Reading	45 minutes
Activity 4.4	Writing	90 minutes
Activity 4.5	Research and writing	120 minutes

Listening

CD1 *Writing Plays*, Tracks 2, 3 and 4: Tanika Gupta, Helen Blakeman and Alan Ayckbourn talking to Derek Neale about writing dialogue.

Questions to think about while you listen

- In what way does Gupta go about finding the voices for her characters, and how does she use word order in writing dialogue?
- How important is the location to the characters of Blakeman's play, *Caravan*, and how does she realise a particular dialect in the voices?
- What does Ayckbourn say about developing and planning a play – when does he write the dialogue?
- What do all three writers say about the pace of dialogue and how important it is?
- How important is punctuation to the actors?
- What redrafting and listening techniques can you use to get the voices right?

Background information

Tanika Gupta was born in 1963 and is an award-winning playwright who has also written for television – including *The Bill*, *EastEnders* and *Grange Hill*. Her stage plays include *A River Sutra* (1997), an award-winning adaptation of Gita Mehta's novel, and *Gladiator Games* (2005), a docu-drama based on the tragic events surrounding the racist murder of Zahid Mubarek in Feltham Young Offenders' Institute in 2000. Her plays often address serious issues but are also typified by a comic and colloquial use of language.

In the interview she mentions three of her plays. *Fragile Land* (2003) is a play aimed at a young audience, which examines what nationhood means to second-generation immigrants and the complexity of life for young Londoners. *The Waiting Room* (2000) is about a woman who has just died and is being guided round her former life by a Bollywood star before going on to the waiting room of the spirits. *Sanctuary* (2002) is a play set in a London graveyard that provides a haven for various characters. The peace is disturbed when Kabir, the gardener, discovers that Michael was not a victim of the atrocities in Rwanda but played a rather different role. An extract from this play is contained in the Handbook (Reading 12) and is discussed in Chapter 4.

Helen Blakeman was born in 1971 and is a playwright who has also written television drama, including the award-winning *Pleasureland* (2003). She graduated from the Birmingham MA programme in play writing, which was then run by David Edgar. A number of her stage plays – including her first play, *Caravan* (1998) – are concerned with the dilemmas of family relationships and contain dialect voices.

In the interview she talks about *Caravan*, which is set in a holiday resort in North Wales and is about a family in turmoil. Fifteen-year-old Kim becomes pregnant as the result of being raped, and her older sister, Kelly, falls for the man who raped her. Set in the early 1990s, with a backdrop of the Liverpool dock strike, the same man is labelled a 'scab' because he continues to work while others are striking. The play's dialogue is discussed in Chapter 4 of the Handbook.

Alan Ayckbourn was born in 1939 and has written more than seventy stage plays. He has at various times been a writer, a director and an actor, and was artistic director of the Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough for a number of years. His tragi-comedies satirise middle-class manners, and are set in apt locations – gardens, bedrooms, lounges and once even on a boat. His first West End hit was *Relatively Speaking* (1968), and subsequent plays include *The Norman Conquests* (1975) and *A Chorus of Disapproval* (1985). He was knighted for his services to theatre in 1997.

In this track he mentions his plays (in the following order) *Bedroom Farce* (1978), *Things We Do for Love* (1998), *Man of the Moment* (1990) and *Absurd Person Singular* (1974). He discusses the last two in a little more detail.

Man of the Moment is the story of a foiled bank robber, Vic, who becomes a celebrity by writing his autobiography. He is reunited in a television programme with the unassuming man, Douglas, who prevented the bank robbery. Vic subsequently dies in the swimming pool at his Spanish villa, and Douglas is involved again.

Absurd Person Singular is set over three Christmases and tells the story of three married couples. Their fortunes reverse during the course of the play, epitomised by Geoffrey and Eva. In the first Christmas, their marriage is seen to be failing and Eva tries to kill herself. By the end, Geoffrey is dependent on her.

References

- Ayckbourn, Alan (1974) *Absurd Person Singular*, London: Samuel French.
- Ayckbourn, Alan (1978) *Bedroom Farce*, London: Samuel French.
- Ayckbourn, Alan (1990) *Man of the Moment*, London: Samuel French.
- Ayckbourn, Alan (1998) *Things We Do for Love*, London: Faber and Faber.
- Blakeman, Helen (1998) *Caravan*, London: Samuel French.
- Gupta, Tanika (2000) *The Waiting Room*, London: Faber and Faber.
- Gupta, Tanika (2002) *Sanctuary*, London: Oberon.
- Gupta, Tanika (2003) *Fragile Land*, London: Oberon.

Forum

Here are some suggestions for group discussion:

- Post some of your dialogue exchanges in response to Activities 4.4 and 4.5.
- Discuss how you responded to *Sanctuary* and what Gupta says of her play, thinking about how to realise an idiom without making it comic or caricatured.
- Discuss your responses to the audio interviews with Blakeman and Ayckbourn – and comment on any dialogue you have overheard.

TMA and ECA preparation

This week you may find it useful to:

- Start reviewing your story material in the light of the stage adaptation of 'Violin Lessons' seen in this chapter.
- List the possible cast for your drama.
- Note the potential contrasts in voice between the characters and how such contrasts might be developed.

Useful resources

- During the drama section of the course there will be occasional, optional 'writing gym' exercises on the website, connected to writing dialogue. This week there is an exercise which involves getting characters to speak at cross-purposes, wanting different things from a situation but never stating their wants explicitly.
- Check the A363 website for any useful links and extra items.

Week 6 Revealing secrets

Themes for the week

- Revealing information to the audience by dramatising exposition;
- Using monologues and subtext as part of storytelling;
- Considering the role of dramatic irony in creating contrasts and intrigue;
- Exploring how to use status relationships in order to move the story along;
- Developing strategies for dramatic adaptations.

Schedule of work

This week you will focus on how to go about revealing the necessary details of a story to the audience. You will consider using monologues and subtext in order to deliver exposition. In developing further methods of writing dramatic adaptations you will explore the possibility of using dramatic irony and the status relationship between characters in order to heighten conflict and push the story forward.

Reading

Chapter 5 of the Handbook, which includes three reading activities:

Activity 5.1

- Reading 13, from Caryl Churchill's play, *Top Girls* – to look at the way Churchill marks interjections in lines of dialogue and the way in which exposition is dramatised.

Activity 5.4

- Reading 14, from Harold Pinter's play, *The Homecoming* – to look at the way the dialogue in the scene creates subtext and meaning beyond the words that are spoken.

Activity 5.6

- Reading 15, from Keith Johnstone, 'Status' – to look at how status is relevant to an actor and to assess how it may be of use to a writer.

Writing

There are four writing activities:

Activity 5.2

- Writing a restaurant or dinner scene with three or four characters, which starts to deliver an exposition about one of the characters, and which pays attention to pace, rhythm and interruption.

Activity 5.3

- Writing a monologue for one of the characters in the dining scene from the previous activity or for the character of Boori Ma from the short story 'A Real Durwan' by Jhumpa Lahiri, read and discussed in Chapter 1.

Activity 5.5

- Developing the scene around the dining table by having two characters trying to make a third character leave, but without telling the character – so creating a subtext in the scene.

Activity 5.7

- Rewriting an interview scene, and producing four different versions in order to heighten the status relationship between the characters in various ways, seeing how this might move the story forward.

Activity timings

The following timings are intended as a general guide:

Activity 5.1	Reading	45 minutes
Activity 5.2	Writing	90 minutes
Activity 5.3	Writing	90 minutes
Activity 5.4	Reading	30 minutes
Activity 5.5	Writing	90 minutes
Activity 5.6	Reading	40 minutes
Activity 5.7	Writing	45 minutes

Listening

CD1 *Writing Plays*, Tracks 5 and 6

Track 5: a BBC interview with Mark Ravenhill, who talks about how to generate a forward dynamic in a scene, about exposition and about how language is used on stage;

Track 6: Angela Hind introducing different performances of the job interview scene from Chapter 5 in the Handbook. She then goes on to talk to the actors about their approach to status and stage directions, and the track concludes with a brief scene played by the same actors from an adaptation of George Bernard Shaw's *You Never Can Tell*, also in Chapter 5.

Questions to think about while you listen

- In what way does Ravenhill go about delivering exposition to the audience?
- How important is concision and how can you make your dramas more concise?
- How does stage dialogue differ from real-life dialogue?
- What do the actors suggest the writer should provide in terms of stage directions and status?
- In this Shaw adaptation, the character M'Comas has become a woman – does this change the dynamic of the scene at all?
- Do any of the improvements or approaches to the job interview script suggested by the actors tally with the changes you made to the scene when working on it in Activity 5.7?

Background information

Mark Ravenhill was born in 1966. He is a challenging and controversial playwright whose dramas often consist of loosely connected episodes, like snapshots, where the audience has to invent the linking narrative. Plays such as *Shopping and Fucking* (1996) and *Some Explicit Polaroids* (1999) are populated by criminals, sex workers, junkies and people who are drifting, sometimes psychotically, through life. The action is often visceral and graphic, as his titles suggest.

Angela Hind is a producer at Pier Productions. She produced all of the audio CDs and the DVD for A363.

The actors on CD1 *Writing Plays*, Track 6 are Lucie Fitchett and Russell Floyd.

Viewing

DVD *Writing for Stage and Film*, Clips 2 and 3: extracts from *Top Girls*, where you will see paced dialogue and extended exposition, and *The Homecoming*, where you will see an example of subtext in a scene. View these **after** you have done the reading activities involving those plays (Activities 5.1 and 5.4).

Those viewing the subtitled version of the *Top Girls* clip may need to use the script for the scene (Reading 13) in combination with the DVD.

Questions to think about while you watch

- What is the effect in performance of the pacing and interruption that Churchill has put into the script?
- What do you learn of each of the characters in *Top Girls* and how is the exposition handled?
- In *The Homecoming*, how is the exposition achieved and what do you learn of the situation and characters?
- Compare the script with the performance – what is being revealed in the subtext of *The Homecoming*?

Discussion of performance

You can see how in the *Top Girls* scene – a non-realistic situation in which characters from different eras meet – the event is made natural by the way in which the characters speak. The dialogue is littered with lulls and crescendos and there are many lines which are incomprehensible because characters are talking over each other. This resembles natural dialogue exchanges. What is startling is the fact that rather than obscuring meaning, the hubbub of the exchanges makes the exposition more clear.

In this performance of *The Homecoming* you can see that the setting and situation are naturalistic, yet something about the acting is not quite so. This is partly connected to the fact that Pinter's plays have an absurdist element. The situations portrayed offer up events which are quite plausible and real but which also contain elements which appear nonsensical. This can lead to comedy or, as here, to a more threatening tension. The voices are stylised yet also recognisably colloquial. The silences and pauses help to create the rhythm of thought underlying what the characters say – the subtext. This offers a pressing sense of conflict, hinting at past fractures in the relationship between Ruth and Teddy but also foreshadowing the conflict to come.

Obviously both of these plays are filmed, which offers a slightly different version of the plays than you would experience in a theatre. For instance, in *The Homecoming*, the tableau of Teddy staring at Ruth while Lenny is

staring at Teddy is achieved with both interior and exterior camera shots: the stillness of the moment is fractured; the image is less powerful on film.

Forum

Here are some suggestions for group discussion:

- Post your thoughts on one of the readings or CD tracks, or any other topic, in the voice of one of your characters from Activity 5.2.
- Post your thoughts on the differences between script and performance with *Top Girls*, *The Homecoming* and the status exercise (CD1 *Writing Plays*, Track 6).
- Share some of the tactics you would use to heighten and lower status in Activity 5.7.

TMA and ECA preparation

This week you may find it useful to:

- Write a monologue in the voice of a character you intend to include in TMA 02. You probably won't include this in your final script but write it as a form of character research and as practice in some of the monologue writing techniques.
- Identify opportunities in your original story to use subtext and some of the expository devices explored in the chapter.
- With your cast list, note down any social status elements (master/servant; doctor/patient, etc.) that are immediately apparent. Then look at your characters in the light of the interactive status between them.

Useful resources

- There is a 'writing gym' exercise on the website this week which involves putting a character in a 'hot seat' and interviewing them, as suggested by Alan Ayckbourn (CD1 *Writing Plays*, Track 4);
- There is a section on developing a character and 'hot seating' in the A215 Workbook (p.77);
- Check the A363 website for any useful links and extra items.

Week 7 Staging stories

Themes for the week

- Creating a visual narrative and writing physical action for the stage;
- Writing for a particular type of stage and creating a set;
- Establishing what is meant by a scene;

- Looking at how dramatic action works over the course of a play and in individual scenes;
- Exploring ways of staging adaptations.

Schedule of work

This week you will focus on the visual and physical aspects of writing for the stage and consider using different types of stage and different kinds of set. You will examine the structural aspects of play writing, in particular looking at how to create dramatic action and how to shape a scene.

Reading

Chapter 6 of the Handbook, which includes three reading activities:

Activity 6.3

- Four play sets: *The Wild Duck* by Henrik Ibsen; *Greek* by Steven Berkoff; *Comedians* by Trevor Griffiths; *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* by Brian Friel – to look at the different possible stage and set arrangements for a play.

Activity 6.5

- Reading 16, from *Our Country's Good* by Timberlake Wertenbaker – to look at how scenes are structured and how dramatic action carries the story forward.

Activity 6.6

- Reading 2, rereading 'A Real Durwan' by Jhumpa Lahiri, first discussed in Chapter 1 – to look at how a stage adaptation of this story might work.

Writing

There are five writing activities:

Activity 6.1

- Writing a brief scene on a chosen type of stage – one character with a mobile phone, trying to create a physical and visual narrative with little dialogue.

Activity 6.2

- Developing the scene from the previous activity so that it has some shape, a rising dramatic action and some sort of climax and resolution.

Activity 6.4

- Writing a set description for a stage adaptation of 'A Real Durwan'.

Activity 6.6

- Planning a stage adaptation of 'A Real Durwan', imagining the overall dramatic action and the shape of individual scenes, as well as the visual narrative – in effect writing a scenario for it.

Activity 6.7

- Writing one or two scenes from your scenario for 'A Real Durwan'.

Activity timings

The following timings are intended as a general guide:

Activity 6.1	Writing	45 minutes
Activity 6.2	Writing	45 minutes
Activity 6.3	Reading	20 minutes
Activity 6.4	Writing	30 minutes
Activity 6.5	Reading	30 minutes
Activity 6.6	Reading and writing	90 minutes
Activity 6.7	Writing	90 minutes

Listening

CD1 *Writing Plays*, Tracks 7, 8 and 9: Alan Ayckbourn and David Edgar talking to Derek Neale about visual aspects of play writing, stage time, dramatic action, adaptation and types of stage.

Questions to think about while you listen

- How important is visual narrative to the way you might dramatise a story?
- What sort of time frame, as mentioned by Ayckbourn in Track 7, would you like to use in your scripts?
- Ayckbourn mentions using what he calls 'foyer time' and a more wide-ranging sort of time. Which would be more appropriate to the story you want to dramatise?
- How does Edgar describe dramatic action and what is its significance for how you might structure a story on stage?
- What approaches to adaptation does he suggest? How might you use some of these in your own dramatisations?
- What are the advantages of theatre-in-the-round? Do you think any of your stories could be presented on such a stage?

Background information

David Edgar was born in 1948. He is often billed as a political playwright and has written state-of-the-nation plays such as *Destiny* (1976), state-of-Europe plays such as *Pentecost* (1994), and has also written for film, radio and television. He founded the UK's first MA programme in play writing at the University of Birmingham. He has written a number of adaptations, some based on the novels of such authors as Charles Dickens and Robert Louis Stevenson. He has also adapted autobiographies, such as that of Mary Barnes, a patient of the radical psychiatrist R.D. Laing. His adaptations and original scripts often examine the wider politics surrounding the lives of individuals.

During the interview Edgar refers to Alan Bennett's film based on his own play *The Madness of George III* (1992) and to Caryl Churchill's play *Top Girls* (1982). You looked at the latter in Week 5. He also talks about his own adaptations *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* (stage version 1980, televised version 1982), *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1991) and *Albert Speer* (2000), based on Gitta Sereny's biography of Hitler's architect.

In Track 9 Alan Ayckbourn talks about his play *Way Upstream*, which is set on a cabin cruiser. He mentions Shakespeare's history play *Henry V* as being an ideal play to perform on a theatre-in-the-round stage. He also mentions the abbreviated term 'the pros' for the proscenium arch type of stage, as seen in Figure 3 in Chapter 6 of the Handbook.

References

Ayckbourn, Alan (1983) *Way Upstream*, London: Samuel French.

Bennett, Alan (1992) *The Madness of George III*, London: Faber and Faber.

Churchill, Caryl (1982) *Top Girls*, London: Methuen.

Edgar, David (1982) *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*, London: Dramatists Play Service.

Edgar, David (1991) *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, London: Nick Hern Books.

Edgar, David (2000) *Albert Speer*, London: Nick Hern Books.

Forum

Here are some suggestions for group discussion:

- Post some of your scenes in response to Activities 6.1 and 6.2, developing action and tension in a scene.

- Discuss your responses to the audio interviews with Ayckbourn and Edgar and what you think are the consequences to your writing of what they say about visual narrative and dramatic action.
- Post your responses to the different kinds of stages and possible sets.

TMA and ECA preparation

This week you may find it useful to:

- Review your proposed story for TMA 02 in the light of the adaptation and dramatisation suggestions made in this and the previous two chapters.
- If you are going to write a stage script for TMA 02, consider the staging possibilities and write a possible set.
- Try to identify obvious scene divisions and sequences, together with the potential for dramatic action and structural shape.
- If you are not going to write a stage script for TMA 02, you can still apply many of the methods in Chapters 4–6 in the Handbook – for instance, to do with dialogue, exposition, visual narrative and dramatic action. Many of these approaches will be relevant no matter which medium you are writing for.

Useful resources

- There is an audio clip on the website with two characters saying variations of the word ‘yes’ to each other – see how this sounds, thinking of Ravenhill’s exercise of restricting speakers to three, then eight words each.
- There is a ‘writing gym’ dialogue exercise on the website which is all about using words concisely – it relates to the ‘yes’ dialogue clip and to the suggestions made by Ravenhill.
- Check the A363 website for any useful links and extra items.

Week 8 Writing radio drama

Themes for the week

- Creating audio contrasts using voices and sound effects;
- Writing engaging radio dialogue and monologues, creating distinct voices;
- Using correct layout for radio and writing concisely for the medium;
- Creating well structured radio scenes;
- Creating ‘sound pictures’ which engage the listener’s imagination and help to link scenes;
- Developing methods for adapting a story for radio.

Schedule of work

This week you will focus on writing radio drama, developing aural contrasts in your scripts, considering how a radio adaptation might be written and looking at the correct layout for radio.

Reading

Chapter 7 of the Handbook, which includes three reading activities:

Activity 7.1

- Reading 17, from *Temporary Shelter* by Rose Tremain – to look at the way in which characters and location are established, and at the sort of pictures that are conjured up for the listener.

Activity 7.3

- A radio adaptation of part of 'Violin Lessons'. This is the short story discussed in Chapter 1 (Reading 1), and it would be useful to reread it with this script – to look at the way you might go about writing a radio adaptation and how exposition is achieved.

Activity 7.6

- Reading 18, from *Cigarettes and Chocolate* by Anthony Minghella – to look at how the voice is made distinct and how it is dramatised.

Writing

There are four writing activities:

Activity 7.2

- Writing one or two scenes of a radio script which establishes a holiday location and contrasts in the voices.

Activity 7.5

- Writing a five-minute radio adaptation of 'A Real Durwan' or a story of your own, using linking devices and contrasting voices and displaying a structural cohesion.

Activity 7.7

- Choosing from a range of possible voices and writing a radio monologue, attempting to dramatisé the voice and make it engaging for the listener.

Activity 7.8

- Writing a narrator's opening, possibly using poetic devices, for a non-realistic radio play.

Editing

There is one editing activity:

Activity 7.4

- Editing the 'holiday' script, so that it is written with the correct layout and uses linking devices.

Activity timings

The following timings are intended as a general guide:

Activity 7.1	Reading	30 minutes
Activity 7.2	Writing	90 minutes
Activity 7.3	Reading	30 minutes
Activity 7.4	Editing	60 minutes
Activity 7.5	Writing	120 minutes
Activity 7.6	Reading	20 minutes
Activity 7.7	Writing	60 minutes
Activity 7.8	Writing	60 minutes

Listening

CD2 *Radio, Film and Fiction*, Tracks 2–5

Tracks 2, 3 and 4: extracts from the radio plays *Temporary Shelter*, *The Veldt* (two separate clips) and *Sunday Morning at the Centre of the World*;

Track 5: Jane Rogers talking to Derek Neale about writing radio adaptations, and in particular about adapting her novel *Island*.

Questions to think about while you listen

- In *Temporary Shelter*, how are place and characters established? How are characters differentiated? Could you use any of these techniques?
- In *The Veldt*, how are audio contrasts established and how do they help to establish place and conflict? Would these be of use to you in your script?
- In *Sunday Morning at the Centre of the World*, what part does the narrator play in the drama and how are the voices different from naturalistic voices?
- With *Temporary Shelter* and *Sunday Morning at the Centre of the World*, how did the performance differ from how you imagined it from reading the script?

- How does Rogers set about adapting stories for radio and in particular what does she say about the number of characters? Does this have implications for your own script?
- How does she approach the inclusion of sound effects and music in her script? Can you use any of these techniques in your drama?
- What does she say about scenes and structure? Will you be titling and numbering scenes or structuring the action more continuously?

Background information

Temporary Shelter, written by Rose Tremain, was first broadcast by the BBC in 1984. It tells the story of an encounter between various characters on a campsite in France, but in particular the meeting between two characters – one an out-of-work actor, one a failing salesman – who are both going through a mid-life crisis. Track 2 relates to Reading 17, and the extract is discussed in this week's chapter of the Handbook.

The Veldt, written by Mike Walker, is an adaptation of a Ray Bradbury story. It was first broadcast by the BBC in 2007 and tells the futuristic story of a world in which many things are automated. It focuses on one household in which the children have a virtual reality playroom where the African veldt can be scarily realised. Human contact between parents and children is missing from this world and the mother and father eventually fall prey to the animals that prowl in their children's lair. The story and the method of the two extracts from the play heard in Track 3 are discussed in this week's chapter in the Handbook.

Sunday Morning at the Centre of the World, by Louis de Bernières, was first broadcast by the BBC in 1999. It is a homage to Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*, and presents the various characters of Earlsfield, a suburb of London where de Bernières once lived. Like the Thomas play, the narrative lacks plot but reveals the world through voices, music and comic contrasts. This week's chapter in the Handbook contains an extract of the play's script and further discussion.

Jane Rogers was born in 1952. She is a novelist who has also written original radio and television dramas, as well as adapting her own stories and those of other authors. She was nominated for a BAFTA for her television adaptation of her novel *Mr Wroe's Virgins*. She has written a film adaptation of her novel *Promised Lands*, which is about the arrival of the first fleet in Australia in 1788. Asked about the delay in getting the film made she says: 'If you will write novels that involve taking a fleet to Australia and then building a city, and having three hundred Aborigines feasting on a beached whale, it's expensive.'

Island is the story of a contemporary young woman who is abandoned at birth and who, as an adult, sets out to find her birth mother. She has had a difficult time in foster care and blames the problems of her life on the absent mother. She aims to kill her.

Rogers also mentions some of the novels she has adapted for radio. These are included in the reference list below. She also refers to the play by A.R. Gurney, *Love Letters* (1990), a drama in which the action is revealed entirely through the correspondence of two separated characters, sitting at different tables on the stage, reciting their letters.

References

Blackmore, R.D. (1961 [1869]) *Lorna Doone*, London: Dent.

Brontë, Charlotte (1994 [1849]) *Shirley*, London: Penguin.

Delafield, E.M. (1984 [1930]) *Diary of a Provincial Lady*, London: Virago.

Gurney, A.R. (1990) *Love Letters*, London: Penguin.

Rogers, Jane (2000) *Island*, London: Abacus.

Wharton, Edith (1996 [1920]) *The Age of Innocence*, London: Penguin.

Forum

Here are some suggestions for group discussion:

- Post your thoughts on the readings featured this week – for instance, *Temporary Shelter*, *The Veldt*, *Sunday Morning at the Centre of the World*, *Island*, *Cigarettes and Chocolate*, noting in particular the way voices and sound effects are used.
- Post and discuss some of your responses to the writing activities in Chapter 7, especially Activity 7.7 – compare how fellow writers interpret a voice and carry it forward; can any of the voices talk to one another?
- Discuss your responses to the audio items – the interview with Rogers, and the difference between script and performance with the radio play excerpts.

TMA and ECA preparation

This week you may find it useful to:

- Look at your proposed story for TMA 02 in the light of the radio adaptation of ‘Violin Lessons’ seen in Chapter 7.
- Note any audio strengths in your proposed story and assess whether it may be suited to radio. Does it have an internal voice? Does it involve a lot of voices but little visual narrative?

Useful resources

- On the A363 website you can find:
 - a section of script for the radio version of *Island* which contains Jane Rogers's annotations from changes made during rehearsal and production;
 - an uninterrupted seven-minute excerpt from the start of *Island*;
 - a Word version of the radio adaptation of 'Violin Lessons' as seen in Chapter 7 of the Handbook, so that you can check the layout.
- Check the A363 website for any useful links and extra items.

Week 9 Writing films

Themes for the week

- Writing film scripts and learning about what elements to include;
- Telling stories, revealing action and characters through pictures and scenes;
- Using correct layout for film scripts;
- Considering the film shot and montage – the cuts between shots;
- Adapting stories for film.

Schedule of work

This week you will focus on creating visual narratives to complement all the work you have already done on dialogue. You will consider the correct layout for film scripts and explore ways of using the camera shot and cuts between shots in order to carry the narrative forward.

Reading

Chapter 8 of the Handbook, which includes three reading activities:

Activity 8.1

- The storyboard and script extract from *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, script by James Hart, film directed by Francis Ford Coppola – to look at the different types of information contained in the storyboard and script.

Activity 8.2

- Reading 19, from *An Angel at My Table* by Laura Jones – to assess how much of the narrative is conveyed through images and how much is conveyed through dialogue.

Activity 8.5

- An adaptation of part of 'Violin Lessons'. This is the short story discussed in Chapter 1 (Reading 1) – you will be looking at how film

techniques might be used and what of the original story might be retained, what discarded and what needs augmenting in a film adaptation. You will find it helpful to review the original story for this activity.

Writing

There are three writing activities:

Activity 8.3

- Writing up to three scenes of a film adaptation of 'A Real Durwan' or a story of your own, creating a narrative predominantly without dialogue.

Activity 8.4

- Developing the scenes from the previous activity, adding dialogue and expanding the script to five scenes.

Activity 8.6

- Redrafting the previous script so that it is written with the correct layout.

Editing

There are two editing activities:

Activity 8.4

- Developing the scenes from Activity 8.3, checking the structure and length of each scene.

Activity 8.6

- Editing the script from Activities 8.3 and 8.4 so that it takes into account some of the methods covered in the chapter in the Handbook.

Activity timings

The following timings are intended as a general guide:

Activity 8.1	Reading	20 minutes
Activity 8.2	Reading	30 minutes
Activity 8.3	Writing	90 minutes
Activity 8.4	Writing and editing	90 minutes
Activity 8.5	Reading	30 minutes
Activity 8.6	Writing and editing	90 minutes

Viewing

DVD *Writing for Stage and Film*, Clip 4: from *An Angel at My Table*;
Clips 5 and 6: from the opening sequences of *Short Cuts* and *The Hours*.

Questions to think about while you watch

- How much of the story is told visually, how much through the dialogue? Try turning the volume down or just listening to the soundtrack without watching. Could you cut down on the dialogue in your own scripts?
- What do you learn of any of the characters or the situations? Could your writing benefit from any of these methods of concise exposition?
- *Short Cuts* and *The Hours* are films with multiple narrative strands. How long are the scenes and how are the disparate situations established and then linked with one another? Could you use any of these methods in your own scripts?
- With *An Angel at My Table* and *The Hours*, how does the performance match the scripts (Readings 19 and 20)?

Discussion of performance

The scenes in *An Angel at My Table* are very short and predominantly visual until we get to the dramatic encounter with the teacher. Then the scenes lengthen. And it is then too that we learn more about the character of Jean and also about the character of the teacher. Yet even here, much of the narrative and action is portrayed visually: the dialogue is very concise.

The script in Reading 19 is an extract from Laura Jones's submitted adaptation script, written before filming began and long before the editing was completed. You will notice that this script doesn't quite match the final edited performance. Some scenes in the script don't appear in the film and there are other scenes in the film which don't appear in the script. For instance, here is the scene on the train:

Janet is lying on a railway carriage seat, covered with Dad's coat. She is in a train-sick, half sleep, her head on Mum's lap.

The family sits around her. There is the clanging sound of the crossing bells.

Janet wakes, sits up, and looks out of the window at the strange landscape: swamps, flax, rushes, willows, the light on an expanse of shadowy water. There is the hodda-hodda sound of the train crossing the wooden bridge over the water.

The train is standing at a station. Myrtle and Bruddie [Janet's siblings] kneel at a window, looking out.

Myrtle: (reading) Sea-cliff.

Bruddie: That's where the loonies go.

Mum: Ssshh. Come away from the window, Bruddie, Myrtle.

Janet looks up over Mum's arm, out of the window at the railway sign:

SEACLIFF in big letters.

Janet sees one of the 'loonies' – a man stands with his back against the post of the sign, rubbing his back, side to side, over and over, his face lost to the rhythm.

Mum's arm comes down, cradling Janet, blocking her view.

(Jones, 1990, p.6)

In Jones's submitted script this scene is placed later in the storyline. In the film it is inserted before the incident with the teacher, Miss Botting. The director, Jane Campion, has altered not only Jones's script but also the chronology of Frame's autobiography (to which Jones adhered). Similarly, Jones had a voice-over right at the start of her script, running through the first few scenes, which was very similar in tone to the narrative voice in Frame's writing:

Janet: *(voice-over)* From the first place of liquid darkness, within the second place of air and light, I set down the following record with its mixture of fact and truths and memories of truths and its direction always toward the Third Place, where the starting point is myth.

(Jones, 1990, p.1)

This was cut and a plain-speaking voice-over, giving basic narrative information, was put in its place (as you can hear). Also, the scene in the playground in Jones's script, when Jean hears the imagined whispers of 'THIEF', is in the film amalgamated into the classroom scene: Jean hears the word 'THIEF' echo round the room as she returns to her seat after making her admission.

These sorts of changes in a submitted script, even though it is an entirely successful one, are to be expected. As scriptwriter Steve Wetton says: 'Even when your script is entirely original ... you must bear in mind that if it's ever considered for production, people will demand changes' (Wetton, 2005, p.20). You will not be the sole proprietor of the script; others will chop and change it, as the production proceeds. For this reason some writers find it very difficult to work in film or television.

There are smaller discrepancies between script and performance with *The Hours*. This is because the script of this film was published in a post-production version, after all such changes (during the filming and editing) had been implemented. In *The Hours* you will notice the prominence of flowers, washing and beds in the three strands. These act to

link the narratives. In *Short Cuts* various devices link the scenes – television, helicopters, toy helicopters and the jazz singer.

References

Jones, Laura (1990) *An Angel at My Table* (screenplay based on the autobiography by Janet Frame), London: Pandora.

Wetton, Steve (2005) *Writing TV Scripts*, Bishops Lydeard: Studymates.

Forum

Here are some suggestions for group discussion:

- Discuss comparisons between script and performance and whether the films matched what you imagined from their screenplay.
- Post some of your film scriptwriting in response to Activities 8.3, 8.4 and 8.6.
- Post some extracts of script in the correct layout for film, to discuss layout issues.

TMA and ECA preparation

This week you may find it useful to:

- Try to decide which medium you wish to use to write your adaptation for TMA 02.
- Decide on time frame and cast list.
- Note what scenes you will need and what happens in each of them.

Useful resources

- On the A363 website: a Word version of the film adaptation of 'Violin Lessons', as seen in Chapter 8 of the Handbook, so you can check the layout.
- Check the A363 website for any useful links and extra items.

Week 10 Film structure

Themes for the week

- Charting the overall dramatic action of a film script;
- Charting the three-part structure of rising and falling action in each scene;
- Writing step outlines as part of the planning for a script;
- Arranging plots and subplots;
- Creating links between different narrative strands;
- Using voice-over and flashback in your scripts;
- Developing methods and approaches for film adaptations.

Schedule of work

This week you will focus on structure in film scripts, on how dramatic action operates overall and in individual scenes, and on how to organise plots and subplots. You will consider the use of techniques such as flashback and voice-over, as well as considering how to create ‘inciting incidents’ and ‘step outlines’.

Reading

Chapter 9 of the Handbook, which includes three reading activities:

Activity 9.1

- An extract from the step outline for the film *Chinatown* – to look at the way the story is charted and the film’s inciting incident.

Activity 9.3

- Reading 20, from *The Hours* by David Hare – to look at how different story strands are established and how they are linked.

Activity 9.5

- Reading 21, from *The Singing Detective* by Dennis Potter – to look at the use of flashback, the use of linking devices between different time zones and the use of dialect voices.

Writing

There are three writing activities:

Activity 9.2

- Writing a step outline for a film adaptation of ‘A Real Durwan’, adding a thriller element, a subplot and using a three-part structure throughout.

Activity 9.4

- Writing two scenes which are not consecutive, one concerned with the main plot, one concerned with the subplot – including some connecting element such as a leitmotif.

Activity 9.6

- Writing either an adaptation for film containing one or two flashback scenes, possibly using voice-over, or a radical film adaptation which relocates the events of an original story in a different time or culture.

Activity timings

The following timings are intended as a general guide:

Activity 9.1	Reading	20 minutes
Activity 9.2	Writing	45 minutes

Activity 9.3	Reading	45 minutes
Activity 9.4	Writing	90 minutes
Activity 9.5	Reading	30 minutes
Activity 9.6	Writing	90 minutes

Listening

CD2 *Radio, Film and Fiction*, Track 6: Jane Rogers talking to Derek Neale about writing for film and television and in particular about adapting for television her own novel *Mr Wroe's Virgins*.

Questions to think about while you listen

- What does Rogers say about flashback? Do you think you could use such a technique in your scripts?
- What does she identify as the benefits gained as a writer from scripting a dramatic adaptation? Reflect on this when developing your own script.
- How does storytelling on screen differ from storytelling in a novel? Do you agree with her about this?
- What does she say about the characters' journeys and the way time works in film? Can you identify the journey of any of your own characters?
- Rogers declares herself very firmly against the use of voice-over in film, but as with all rules in writing there are always exceptions. Can you think of a film in which voice-over appears necessary?

Background information

Mr Wroe's Virgins is based on a true story – a self-styled prophet in the 1830s in Lancashire announced to his congregation that the Lord had told him he needed seven virgins to give him comfort and succour. His congregation duly presented him with seven girls. The novel and film tell of the experience of four of the girls – Hannah, Leah, Joanna and Martha – while they are with the prophet.

References

Rogers, Jane (1991) *Mr Wroe's Virgins*, London: Faber and Faber.

Talking to a Stranger (1966) BBC television drama, John Hopkins (writer), Christopher Morahan (director).

The Beach (2000) film based on the novel by Alex Garland, John Hodge (writer), Danny Boyle (director).

Trainspotting (1996) film based on the novel by Irvine Welsh, John Hodge (writer), Danny Boyle (director).

Viewing

This week there are several films on the DVD that are relevant.

DVD *Writing for Stage and Film*, Clip 7: from *The Piano* (two separate sequences are contained in this clip – one from the start and one from the end of the film) and Clip 8: from *Notes on a Scandal*. The film clips show the use of voice-over and how it can offer a counterpoint to the visual action of the scene – sometimes just for moments in a film, sometimes over an extended number of scenes. *The Piano* is discussed in this week's chapter in the Handbook. The novel *Notes on a Scandal* by Zoë Heller is discussed in Chapter 10 of the Handbook.

Questions to think about while you watch

- Try watching each film with the volume turned right down, and then listening to the soundtrack without watching – what do you learn of the characters and events by sound and what by sight?
- How does the information conveyed in the voice-overs contrast with or form a counterpoint to the visual and dialogue information of the scene?
- What do you think of Jane Rogers's rule about never using voice-over after seeing clips from these two films? Are they exceptions?
- Voice-over is nearly always best avoided if it merely duplicates what can be seen and heard in the scenes. Can you find any contrastive use for voice-over in your scripts?

DVD *Writing for Stage and Film*, Clip 9: from *The Singing Detective*, illustrating the use of flashback and various linking devices that imitate the way that associative memory works. The script for this is Reading 21 and is discussed in this week's chapter of the Handbook.

Questions to think about while you watch

- What is the flashback revealing and how is it carrying the story forward?
- How are the different locations linked?
- How does the performance compare with the script (Reading 21)? In particular, think of the dialogue.
- Try the sound-off and then the sound-only ways of perceiving the film – what do you notice?
- Are the various techniques used in this film clip – flashback, linking time zones through music and associations, and the use of contrastive voices – relevant in your scripts?

DVD *Writing for Stage and Film*, Clip 10: a compilation of scenes (which are not consecutive in the television film) about Martha's journey in *Mr Wroe's Virgins*. View this **after** listening to Track 6 on CD2 *Radio, Film and Fiction* (Rogers discussing this adaptation).

Questions to think about while you watch

- The scenes closely follow Martha's psychology. Is there scope for any of your characters to be haunted by flashbacks in similar fashion? What is the danger of this method?
- You have not seen Joanna's state of mind in this sequence of clips, but she has suffered from depression after the death of her baby. Note how she surfaces from the depression and how this is dramatised in the barn scene. Can you solve the interior turning points of any of your characters in a similar way?
- What is the effect of light on certain parts of the story? Can you think of any visual aspect that might work symbolically in your scripts?
- How much of the story is told with dialogue, and how much with images and physical action?

Discussion of performance

The first voice-over in *The Piano* runs over seven scenes and several pages of script. Yet it is primarily a structural voice-over. It occurs only in these two clips – at the very start of the film and right at the end. The effect of this is startling. Hearing the inner voice of someone who is otherwise unable to speak gives the audience a sense of privilege and intimacy. The voice-over in *Notes on a Scandal* is similar in that it runs over several scenes and several pages of script, but not just at the start and end. There is more frequent use of voice-over throughout this film. It works to emulate the narrative voice of the novel on which the film is based. Yet even here, in a film which uses the technique more often, it is far from continuous. As with the voice-over in *The Piano* it reveals inner thoughts, but this time thoughts that the audience might not want to overhear. They amount to the world-weary perceptions of a lonely and embittered teacher, who is grasping at the shadows of lives she has never lived. The voice-over adds a literary quality to the film, and its contrast with the action in the scenes brings out the pathos and desolation of the speaker. It would be difficult to reveal this depth and subtlety of characterisation without using voice-over. You will find more discussion and a synopsis of the novel in Chapter 10 of the Handbook.

In *The Singing Detective* music acts as the key to memory, linking associations for the main character, Marlowe, as he lies in hospital. In a scene not included on this DVD, Marlowe hallucinates that the doctors and

nurses are singing and dancing; in another, the patient in the next bed sings a song in Marlowe's father's voice. In this way fantasy and memory are almost as one. The linking device is often music, as it is here with Bing Crosby singing 'Don't Fence Me In'. In the script this link is hardly prominent, but in performance its effect is poignant and holds multiple meanings. Marlowe is seen initially to be fenced in by his illness and his hospital confinement, and then wonderfully liberated by a youthful memory of being perched at the top of a tree – only to be fenced in again by a claustrophobic domestic scene, and by the feeling of guilt and the reality of his hospital bed. You will also note how the dialect works in performance; the actual sound of this may come as a surprise after reading the script. While the meaning of individual words is occasionally obscured, the overall action and meaning of the scene is crystal clear.

The kind of flashback seen in *Mr Wroe's Virgins* is slightly different from that in *The Singing Detective*. The past seems to be more of a literal 'flash', in black and white when the memory is tragic and in colour when the memory is happier or more conclusive. These memories of Martha's are initially repetitive, enigmatic and incoherent. There is little or no dialogue and they make little narrative sense. Gradually, as Martha develops as a character, the repetitions start to mean more and the scenes become longer and more revealing. Some critics suggest that having the past in black and white and the present in colour is clichéd and too obvious a way of differentiating between time zones. Yet here the differentiation is slightly more complex. The flashbacks vary between colour and black and white, making the story more interesting for the viewer. This innovation wasn't the director's idea but that of the scriptwriter, Jane Rogers, as you will know from Track 6 on CD2 *Radio, Film and Fiction*.

Forum

Here are some suggestions for group discussion:

- Post scenes for your TMA 02 for workshop comment by your tutor group.
- Exchange dialogue from your TMA script and try to read each other's lines aloud before feeding back comments.
- Discuss the various film and television clips viewed this week and, for those clips where you have access to the script, compare the written version with the performance.

TMA and ECA preparation

This week you may find it useful to:

- Try to get a first draft of your TMA 02 completed.
- Review all the chapters in Part 2 of the Handbook. Many principles of dramatic technique apply to all media. For instance, some methods that were explored in Chapters 4–6 of the Handbook – such as those connected with dialogue – apply not only to stage but also to radio and film (though there may be less or more use of dialogue according to the particular medium). Similarly, some aspects of film and radio writing may be relevant to writing a stage play. Check for any useful methods covered in chapters which aren't devoted to your chosen medium.
- Gather preliminary notes for your commentary – look through your notebook and the forum, and check your responses to some of the viewing and listening questions throughout the past six weeks.
- You will recall Alan Ayckbourn saying that some characters occupy the foreground but some are background players and have to be drawn lightly (CD1 *Writing Plays*, Track 4). Check all your characters to make sure none have a disproportionate amount of performance time.

Useful resources

- On the A363 website is the script for the sections of *The Piano* seen in Clip 7 on the DVD, so you can see how a voice-over is scripted and how it runs over several scenes.
- Check the A363 website for any useful links and extra items.

Week 11 Writing week

Schedule of work

This week is devoted to writing – largely towards TMA 02.

There is no Handbook chapter and there are no guided reading or writing activities for this week, though you may like to review Part 2 (Chapters 4–9 of the Handbook and associated readings), for any elements that seem pertinent to your TMA. Look back over things that you are uncertain about or that particularly interest you.

Also, review all the audio and video materials, especially those relating to your chosen medium.

TMA and ECA preparation

If you didn't manage to get a draft of your script written in Week 10, try to get a draft completed early on this week and put it to one side while you get on with your commentary.

For the commentary you can trawl back through your notebook and your responses to activities from Activity 4.1 onwards. Look for comments and discussion on how you have fared when using certain techniques, what you noticed about what you have read during this part of the course, performances that you have seen or heard, or discussion about scripts and adaptations that you have read or participated in. You may have quite a lot of material, so it is important to discriminate; only include or elaborate on discussion points that seem relevant to your particular approach to the TMA. Also, develop it from note form into some sort of narrative about how you came to make the decisions you have made.

You may wish to check the forum for any discussion points relevant to your TMA. Also be aware in your commentary of any final touches you make to your script – the commentary should reflect the entire journey of a piece of writing and not just the conception or one technical issue. You may like to pay particular attention to the decision you made about medium – why did you choose stage, radio or film for this particular story? What was it in the story that you felt was suited to your chosen medium?

Then make the time to leave your commentary for a little while, in the same way you leave your script. Return to it and edit.

As with the commentary for the previous TMA, you will be using your notebook as a resource, looking back through it, as much as writing in it. But remember – deadlines often produce more ideas; you will need them for your ECA and for TMA 05, so make time to note any new ideas that occur to you during this redrafting and editing.

In presentation of all parts of TMA 02 you should follow the layout guidance offered in the Assessment Booklet and in the relevant chapters of the Handbook – Chapter 4 for stage, Chapter 7 for radio and Chapter 8 for film. Performance time limits are crucially important as well – always put a performance time on your work and keep within the performance time limit. Remember that the timings given when using proper layouts for each of the media are only approximate. The only way to gauge an exact performance time is to read through in real time, enacting all of the actions.

Having left your adaptation for a while, return to it; check over it, making sure that your reader can understand the world, events and characters you are dramatising. Remember, you are writing for a director, actors and an audience. Your script has to work on all those levels. The audience, for

instance, will need basic information and signposts to help them find their way around the world you are creating. They will want to see characters and places, to be engaged by conflict. The director and actors need to see opportunities to engage their own imaginations and inventiveness. Make sure your writing is concise but offers sufficient information.

Here is a checklist:

- Can the dialogue be spoken or is it too written?
- Is there enough conflict?
- Is the physical action clearly described?
- Are the dramatic action and forward movement of the story clear?
- Is the layout appropriate for the medium you have chosen?
- Have you been consistent with your chosen time frame?
- Are there any places where the script is overwritten?
- Check that your stage directions or sound effects are concise.
- Make sure you have not overused voice-over and flashback.
- Have you trusted your actors and audience to understand your story?
- Are your characters distinct from one another in terms of voice?
- Have you read the dialogue aloud or heard it read – does the pace and rhythm of it sound right for each character?
- Can the audience understand the story?

These are some of the questions you could ask as you look over your first draft. Edit and redraft accordingly – then put it away again while you edit your commentary.

Part 3 Developing style

Week 12 Film technique in fiction

Themes for the week

- The links between film and fiction;
- Applying film techniques to enhance your stories;
- Story structure.

Schedule of work

This week you will explore the historical links between film and fiction. You will learn how to apply film techniques to your fiction in order to create stories that are visual and sensual, with graceful transitions between scenes and even between sentences. You will study the different kinds of scene used in narrative fiction – dramatic and static – and learn how they can produce a good rhythm. Activities focus on how to construct or revise your stories in an ‘architectural’ way, with well-shaped scenes and a definite story arc.

Reading

Chapter 10 of the Handbook, which includes two reading activities:

Activity 10.1

- The beginning of an invented, ‘faulty’ story – to experience when and how the reader’s involvement is disrupted.

Activity 10.3

- A chapter of a favourite novel or some pages from a current story of your own – to identify types of scene.

Writing

There is one writing activity:

Activity 10.4

- Redesigning one of your stories by itemising its scenes on notecards, checking the mini-arcs of these scenes, then testing the overall structure of the narrative, prior to revising or rewriting it in the light of your discoveries. The purpose is to increase the economy and dramatic power of your story.

Editing

There is one editing activity:

Activity 10.2

Imagining yourself as a writer-director and reviewing one of your stories in terms of 'shots', 'scenes' and 'montage' – to gain practice in using a powerful revision tool which may be applied to all of your fiction.

Activity timings

The following timings are intended as a general guide:

Activity 10.1	Reading	10 minutes
Activity 10.2	Editing	45 minutes
Activity 10.3	Reading	30 minutes
Activity 10.4	Writing	3–4 hours

The last activity has two major parts. The first is an analysis of your story by itemising scenes on notecards, then testing the story's structure. The second is the ensuing revision or rewriting of the story. It would be wise to separate these different tasks, to allow thinking time between the analysis and any changes you decide to make.

Listening

CD2 *Radio, Film and Fiction*, Track 6: Jane Rogers talking to Derek Neale about adapting her novel to film is relevant to the concluding part of Chapter 10: 'The scope of fiction'. You worked with this track in detail in Week 10.

CD3 *Research, Structure and Style*, Tracks 9 and 10: Hilary Mantel talking to Bill Greenwell, in particular about scene construction and how film and drama techniques have strengthened her novel writing. You will work with these tracks in detail in Week 16.

Viewing

DVD *Writing for Stage and Film*, Clip 8: from *Notes on a Scandal*.

Compare the experience of viewing the opening of this film with reading an extract from the novel in the concluding section of Chapter 10. You may like to look back at the points made about use of voice-over in Week 10 of this guide.

Questions to think about while you watch

- What are the similarities in how the film and fiction versions of *Notes on a Scandal* deal with narratorial voice and show characters' inner lives?
- What are the differences?

Forum

Here are some suggestions for group discussion:

- Rewrite the story opening shown in Activity 10.1 to avoid the problem of excessive summary and interruption, then post your version on the forum.
- Post your experience of charting your scenes on notecards and playing with story structure.
- Post your responses to viewing the clip from *Notes on a Scandal* compared with reading an extract.

TMA and ECA preparation

This week you may find it useful to:

- Spend some time searching through forum discussions of fellow students' work-in-progress to identify material you would like to review in TMA 03. The most suitable pieces will be those that have developed significantly in response to critiques or where the issues discussed have influenced your own approaches to writing.
- Make a plan for all of your work during this part of the course, as your four final assignments are due at regular intervals. Two of these (TMA 04 and TMA 06) are staging posts in the development of your ECA project, and this will help you to focus your attention on ECA plans at an appropriate stage. Make a decision soon about which genre you intend to choose for your ECA and start thinking about possible themes and structures.

Useful resources

- On the A363 website Ian McEwan talks about the roles of dreaming and planning in the development of his novels *Amsterdam*, *Enduring Love* and *Atonement*. He describes the different experiences of writing a pre-planned novel and more elusive ones, where the material emerges from months of 'forced doodling'. Listening to this might help you achieve a suitable balance between dreaming and planning in your own work.
- Check the A363 website for any useful links or extra items.

Week 13 Splicing the strands

Themes for the week

- Looking at how storylines in fiction can be juxtaposed and can converge, as they do in film;
- Considering how to link such strands – with a narrative or just simple juxtaposition;
- Creating tension, pace and rhythm in a narrative by cutting;
- Revisiting the notion of playing with genre;
- Trying different types of streams of consciousness.

Schedule of work

This week you will focus on how to cut between narrative strands, and examine how this relates to similar technique in films. You will also consider different approaches to writing a stream-of-consciousness narrative and look at both genre and narrative pacing.

Reading

Chapter 11 of the Handbook, which includes two reading activities:

Activity 11.5

- Reading 22, from *The Hours*, a novel by Michael Cunningham, which itself contains an extract from Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs Dalloway* – to look at the similarities and differences between the two narratives.

Activity 11.6

- An extract from *The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai – to look at the effect the line breaks and short sections have on the narrative.

Writing

There are five writing activities:

Activity 11.1

- Writing separate accounts about two characters in the same village or street on a particular day.

Activity 11.2

- Developing the two characters from Activity 11.1 by getting them to meet.

Activity 11.3

- Creating a story from the previous two writing activities by cutting and pasting to create juxtapositions.

Activity 11.4

- Writing a linking narrative for the story created in Activity 11.3.

Activity 11.7

- Write a new start to the story produced in Activities 11.1–11.4 or the start of a new story, using either a stream-of-consciousness method or brief, image-rich sections.

You might initiate the writing on paper, in your notebook or on a computer, but the work for these activities will eventually involve much editing, redrafting and the possible repositioning of passages. Consequently you will find it easier to achieve the tasks if you revise your drafts on computer.

Editing

There is one editing activity:

Activity 11.4

- Reviewing the writing produced for Activity 11.3 to see how a linking narrative might help the structure.

Activity timings

The following timings are intended as a general guide:

Activity 11.1	Writing	60 minutes
Activity 11.2	Writing	50 minutes
Activity 11.3	Writing	60 minutes
Activity 11.4	Writing and editing	50 minutes
Activity 11.5	Reading	30 minutes
Activity 11.6	Reading	10 minutes
Activity 11.7	Writing	60 minutes

Forum

Here are some suggestions for group discussion:

- With one or more members of your tutor group, post and exchange narrative strands so that you write a story together.
- Post some of your writing for Activities 11.1–11.4 and Activity 11.7, developing narratives by juxtaposing different strands.
- Discuss how you responded to the extracts from *The Hours* and *The Inheritance of Loss* and what you thought of these particular styles.

TMA and ECA preparation

This week you may find it useful to:

- Contribute to and read from your tutor group forum.
- Try to identify strands of discussion and the development of particular pieces of work which you would like to report on for TMA 03.
- Make notes on some elements of technique and approach relating to the forum strands you have identified.

Useful resources

- On the A363 website Derek Neale talks to Jane Rogers about her novel *Mr Wroe's Virgins* and the benefits of creating four different women's voices and juxtaposing those narrative strands.
- There is a section about stream of consciousness in the A215 Workbook, pp.122–3.
- Check the A363 website for any useful links and extra items.

Week 14 Writing week

Schedule of work

This week is devoted to writing – largely towards TMA 03.

There is no chapter in the Handbook and there are no guided reading or writing activities for this week, though you may like to review course materials that have a connection to any of the topics arising in the tutor group forum discussion that you are commenting on. For instance, if your critique is largely about dialogue, you may like to look back at the sections of Chapters 4 and 7 about idiom and idiolect, and listen again to Tracks 2–4 on CD1 *Writing Plays*.

TMA and ECA preparation

Some key reminders about your assignment:

- Rather than writing in general about all of the forum discussion, try to focus on what seem to you to be key discussions.
- You may be interested in several threads, and have too much to write about. In such circumstances, try to pick threads that intrigue you; threads where a piece of work has tangibly developed through a process of commenting and redrafting.
- Reflect on how the writers' processes relate to your own work.
- Remember, you should attempt to analyse what you are reporting and not just list it.

- Relate the discussion wherever possible to other course materials – chapters from the Handbook, audio tracks from the CDs or clips from the DVD.

In particular, discuss and analyse:

- when writers have agreed with comments and taken action successfully;
- when writers have taken action and decided it doesn't work;
- when commentators disagree;
- when writers have resisted taking action but offered reasons for not doing so;
- issues on which you agree or disagree with either the writer or commentators, giving your reasons for doing so.

Try to write a first draft of your report early on in the week. Approach the work as you would a reflection on your own writing process. This is not just abstract literary criticism but involved editorial work – you are reporting as a fellow writer on what another writer has produced and what other fellow writers have said about the inception and journey of that work. Try to identify the aim of the writer and decide whether this aim is being fulfilled, and whether the forum discussion has helped in this respect.

Also, remember to structure your critique, giving it an opening that introduces some of your main points. Go on to expand on these points. Make sure that you clearly identify which messages you are discussing, especially if you quote from a message or refer to it in detail.

Put the first draft of your TMA away for a few days. Reflect in your notebook on any new ideas or methods that you would like to try; anything that you have learned from scanning the forum. This is an assessment that focuses on your editorial awareness but it can also give rise to new ideas, so keep your notebook at hand.

Leave your critique for as long as possible, before returning to it. Edit thoroughly, trying to link your observations with concerted lines of discussion. Make sure you include a bibliography which references appropriately the messages and all other texts that you use in your discussion, including course materials. Information on referencing can be found in the Assessment Booklet.

Week 15 Voices in fiction

Themes for the week

- Considering the similarity between narrative voices in fiction and dramatic monologues;
- Writing voices in fiction which are dramatic and which act as impersonations;
- Trying to write with different registers of voice;
- Exploring how to go about creating fictional communities;
- Styling voices for your fiction;
- Creating unreliable narrators.

Schedule of work

This week you will focus on narrative voices in fiction, on how to make them dramatic, how to style such voices and vary their register. You will also consider using an unreliable narrator as well as how to give your reader an idea of the fictional community you are trying to create.

Reading

Chapter 12 of the Handbook, which includes four reading activities:

Activity 12.1

- Reading 23, from *Her Big Chance*, a monologue for television by Alan Bennett – to look at how it works dramatically and assessing what is learned of the character.

Activity 12.3

- Reading 24, from *Last Orders*, a novel by Graham Swift – to see what typifies the narrative voice and in what dialect the characters are speaking.

Activity 12.5

- Reading from 'Prelude to an Autobiography: A fragment' by Amit Chaudhuri – to see what distinguishes the narrative voice and whether a fictional community can be perceived in the passage.

Activity 12.6

- Readings 25 and 26, from *Be Near Me* by Andrew O'Hagan and a newspaper article by O'Hagan on how the novel was conceived – to look at the contrasting voices in the passage and at how O'Hagan came to invent his narrator.

Writing

There are three writing activities:

Activity 12.2

- Using one of the voices not yet adopted from Figure 7 (Activity 7.7) and writing a passage of fiction in that voice.

Activity 12.4

- Writing in the voice of a character whose profession is unfamiliar to you.

Activity 12.7

- Writing a story that includes contrasts between the narrative voice and the voices of the characters speaking within it.

Activity timings

The following timings are intended as a general guide:

Activity 12.1	Reading	15 minutes
Activity 12.2	Writing	60 minutes
Activity 12.3	Reading	15 minutes
Activity 12.4	Writing	60 minutes
Activity 12.5	Reading	10 minutes
Activity 12.6	Reading	20 minutes
Activity 12.7	Writing	90 minutes

Listening

CD2 *Radio, Film and Fiction*, Track 7: Jane Rogers talking to Derek Neale about writing different narrative voices in her novel *Mr Wroe's Virgins*, about the link between narrative voices and drama, and how to go about writing historical and contemporary voices.

Questions to think about while you listen

- What might be the relationship between dramatic performance and narrators in fiction?
- How does Rogers go about creating historical voices, and how do these differ from contemporary voices?
- What are the limitations of using a first-person voice?
- In *Mr Wroe's Virgins* how do the voices of the four women narrators enact the conflicts of 1830s Britain?

References

Rogers, Jane (1991) *Mr Wroe's Virgins*, London: Faber and Faber.

Rogers, Jane (2000) *Island*, London: Abacus.

Viewing

DVD *Writing for Stage and Film*, Clip 11: from *Her Big Chance*. View this **after** you have done the reading activity involved with this monologue (Activity 12.1).

Questions to think about while you watch

- What is making this single speech dramatic or interesting? Can you spot any of the methods suggested in Chapters 5, 7 and 12 for dramatising monologues?
- How does the monologue offer contrasts in language?
- What visual contrasts are created in the performance as opposed to the script?
- Do you think this monologue would work as a narrative voice for a novel?

Background information

Alan Bennett was born in 1934 and co-wrote and starred in the satirical review *Beyond the Fringe* (1960), along with Dudley Moore, Peter Cook and Jonathan Miller. He has since written many plays for stage, including *Kafka's Dick* (1987) and *The Wind in the Willows* (1991). His film scripts include *The History Boys* (2006) and *The Madness of King George* (1995), both prize-winning adaptations of his own stage plays. His work is often concerned with the everyday and the mundane; it focuses on people with typically British characteristics and obsessions. He has also written the highly acclaimed memoirs *Writing Home* (1994) and *Untold Stories* (2005).

Her Big Chance was part of *Talking Heads 1* (1987), a series of six television monologues in which characters speak directly to camera. This is an unusual method in television, where even documentary makers are forever trying to avoid the static visual presentation of 'talking heads'. Bennett relishes the challenge. Lesley is an actor with aspirations and the monologue catalogues some of the parts she has played, while comically drawing the gap between the films she might like to appear in and the dubious film-makers she is in fact working with.

Forum

Here are some suggestions for group discussion:

- Post thoughts on one of the readings, or any other topic, in the voice of one of your characters from Activity 12.2.
- Post some of your writing in response to Activities 12.2, 12.4 and 12.7.
- Discuss your responses to Track 7 on CD2 *Radio, Film and Fiction*, the interview with Jane Rogers about writing fiction.
- Post your responses to the contrast between the performance and the script of *Her Big Chance*.

TMA and ECA preparation

This week you may find it useful to:

- Look back over your notebook, spotting ideas that you want to develop for the ECA and for TMA 05.
- Try to decide which genres and media you will be using for each of the assignments.

Useful resources

- On the A363 website Ian McEwan talks about how he found himself in the mindset of a thirteen-year-old girl (Briony Tallis) when conceiving his novel *Atonement*.
- There is a discussion of impersonation in fiction writing in the A215 Workbook, pp.76–8 and p.103.
- There is also a discussion of unreliable narrators in the A215 Workbook, pp.105–7.
- Check the A363 website for any useful links and extra items.

Week 16 Rhetoric and style

Themes for the week

- Developing your style so that it uses rhetorical techniques;
- Trying your hand at such techniques as repetition, variation, euphony and parenthesis;
- Using rhythm, sound, vocabulary and other linguistic features to create tone.

Schedule of work

This week you will develop your style, drawing initially on the rhetorical tricks used by orators. Many writers are worried about sounding too

repetitious, but there are forms of repetition which can add considerably to the clarity and energy of fiction and life writing alike.

Reading

Chapter 13 of the Handbook, which includes four reading activities:

Activity 13.1

- Extracts from John F. Kennedy's inaugural address in January 1961 – to consider what rhetorical tactics a speaker uses to persuade an audience to continue listening.

Activity 13.2

- Reading 27, from L.R. Dunne's account of the Bethnal Green disaster – to read an example of 'plain' writing.

Activity 13.3

- Reading 28, from Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* – to consider what stylistic tactics a writer uses to persuade readers to continue reading.

Activity 13.6

- Passages from Liz Jensen's *My Dirty Little Book of Stolen Time* and Hilary Mantel's *Fludd* – to look at contrasting uses of pace and tone, and the use of overstatement and understatement.

Writing

There are four writing activities:

Activity 13.2

- Rewriting a passage from L.R. Dunne's official account of a disaster at Bethnal Green tube station in 1943 to develop it into a piece of fiction, and to apply some of the rhetorical and stylistic devices discussed in the chapter.

Activity 13.4

- Rewriting an extract from an instruction manual of your choice – to practise the use of parenthesis.

Activity 13.5

- Writing two contrasting passages about the sea or a stretch of water – to practise using the techniques of variation, rhythm and euphony.

Activity 13.7

- Writing two contrasting pieces in which the mood or tone are respectively upbeat and understated – to try out some of the techniques illustrated in the passages from Jensen and Mantel.

You may well find that these activities make you, initially at least, hyper-conscious of tiny details of style. That's fine. Remember that, whenever you are using any of the techniques described in the chapter, you need to ensure that they clarify the content of your work, rather than obscure it.

Activity timings

The following timings are intended as a general guide:

Activity 13.1	Reading	10 minutes
Activity 13.2	Reading and writing	60 minutes
Activity 13.3	Reading	30 minutes
Activity 13.4	Writing	40 minutes
Activity 13.5	Writing	60 minutes
Activity 13.6	Reading	15 minutes
Activity 13.7	Writing	60 minutes

Listening

CD3 *Research, Structure and Style*, Tracks 5, 7, 9, 10 and 11: poet Ian McMillan and novelists Liz Jensen and Hilary Mantel talking to Bill Greenwell about the rhythm of prose; about editing for rhythm; about the relationship between poetry and prose; and about the relationship between oratory and prose.

Questions to think about while you listen

- McMillan talks about the poetic rhythms of his favourite prose. How far do you think you can accentuate the rhythm of a piece of prose? You might like to look back to the example of D.H. Lawrence's poem 'Bat' in Chapter 2 (Activity 2.9) as an example of the poetic technique of contrast, and see whether you think this is applicable to prose.
- Mantel says that 'talking comes first for me'. If you are writing a poem, a play script or a piece of prose, what kinds of rhythms can you hear when you read your work aloud?
- How does the way in which you have punctuated your writing affect the way in which you read? Do you need to add or subtract any punctuation?

You will also recall playwrights Helen Blakeman, Alan Ayckbourn and Mark Ravenhill talking to Derek Neale about the rhythms and 'music' of their scripts (CD1 *Writing Plays*, Tracks 3, 4 and 5).

Background information

Hilary Mantel was born in 1952, and has published nine novels, all of which she mentions in her interview. The first, *Every Day is Mother's Day* (1986), is a satire on mental health. Its sequel, *Vacant Possession*, was published in 1987; she reads an extract from it on CD3 *Research, Structure and Style*, Track 11. Mantel has also published a collection of short stories, *Learning to Talk* (2003), and a memoir, *Giving up the Ghost* (2003). She has won many awards, including the Sunday Express Book of the Year Award, the Hawthornden Prize, and the Winifred Holtby Memorial Award. She was made a CBE in 2006.

Her novels are very different in tone and scope. *Eight Months on Ghazzah Street* (1988) is a psychological thriller set in Saudi Arabia; *A Place of Greater Safety* (1992) is a sprawling historical epic set in the French Revolution; *A Change in Climate* (1994) moves between Norfolk and South Africa, and is both an emotional and political mystery tale. *An Experiment in Love* (1995), written in the first person, is a kind of Bildungsroman, exploring the lives of three young women who come from school in the north of England to study in London. Both *Fludd* (1989) and *The Giant, O'Brien* (1998) are satirical novels, the first at the expense of northerners and the Catholic church, the second at the expense of freak-shows in the eighteenth century. *Beyond Black* (2005) is a dark comedy about a spiritualist.

Giving up the Ghost and *The Giant, O'Brien* are both touched on in Chapter 14 of the Handbook. A passage from *Fludd* features in Chapter 13.

Ian McMillan was born in 1956, in Darfield, near Barnsley – where he still lives. He has published fifteen poetry collections, some of which also contain short play scripts and short pieces of prose. He has also written for children. He has been a performer of poetry since the 1980s, and is a frequent radio and television broadcaster and presenter. His poetry residencies have included Barnsley football club and Humberside police force. During the interview, he reads 'A Yorkshire Dialect Rhapsody' (*Selected Poems*, 1987); an extract from 'I'd Better Not' from *I Found This Shirt* (1998); and 'Branwell Brontë is Reincarnated as a Vest' and 'Flat Bull' from *Perfect Catch* (2000).

Forum

Here are some suggestions for group discussion:

- Share sentences you have found in your own reading which you recognise as using some of the techniques discussed in the chapter.
- Post three different examples of the same sentence, varying the technique used, and ask the group for feedback.

- Post extracts of your writing in Activity 13.7, and suggest ways in which you have attempted to distinguish one piece from the other.

TMA and ECA preparation

This week you may find it useful to:

- Look ahead to Weeks 20 and 21, when the writing of TMA 05 and its submission take place. You need to start considering which of the three genres – poetry, life writing or fiction – you will be working in.
- Check the requirements for TMA 04, TMA 05 and the ECA in the Assessment Booklet. By now, you should be planning ahead, not only for TMA 05 but also for the ECA. As you will see, the ECA is in three stages – TMA 04 is an outline proposal for your ECA project and TMA 06 is the first draft of a section from your ECA project.
- Make some decisions about which of the genres – fiction, life writing, drama, poetry – you wish to choose for your ECA. You might be influenced by responses to your TMA 01 and TMA 02, and by feedback from your tutor and fellow students on the forum.
- Establish separate plans for the two projects (TMA 05 and your ECA) in your notebooks. At Level 3, we are expecting you to sustain two projects at the same time.

Useful resources

- For this week of study, perhaps the best resource is yourself: reading aloud your own work and the work of other writers will give you a sense of how prose can possess ‘musicality’.
- On the A363 website you can listen to:
 - Liz Jensen reading the extract from *My Dirty Little Book of Stolen Time* printed in Chapter 13;
 - Hilary Mantel reading the extract from *Fludd* printed in Chapter 13.
- There is a section on ‘revising for style’ in Reading 49 in the A215 Workbook, pp.608–9.
- Check the A363 website for any useful links and audio items.

Week 17 Using analogy

Themes for the week

- Using comparisons to make your writing richer;
- Using key words and images to make your writing fresh;
- Avoiding overloading your work with clashing analogies;
- Considering contrasting attitudes to the use of analogy.

Schedule of work

This week you will look at ways in which analogy (metaphor, simile) and unusual vocabulary can give your writing added force and colour. At the same time, the chapter in the Handbook encourages you to think about the problem of using too rich a mixture of analogies, how to avoid cliché, and also to consider the contrary argument – as advanced by Georges Simenon – that plain writing is preferable.

Reading

Chapter 14 of the Handbook, which includes six reading activities:

Activity 14.2

- A poem in which there is sequence of images – to see how, in this admittedly extreme example, metaphors and similes can be created which draw on a surprising range of sources.

Activity 14.4

- A passage from V.S. Pritchett's short story 'The Wheelbarrow' – to explore the ways in which individual words can add force and resonance to your writing.

Activity 14.5

- A passage from Redmond O'Hanlon's *Into the Heart of Borneo* – to see how analogies can be used to realise a place and an experience that are unfamiliar to us, and also, in this case, how a succession of related analogies can have a comic effect.

Activity 14.6

- Reading 29, from 'In the Pit' by Annie Proulx – to explore writing that is crammed with analogy.

Activity 14.9

- The poem 'Little Dogs Laugh' by Linda France – to look at the way in which the writer develops three different strands of analogy in a single piece.

Activity 14.10

- An extract from Georges Simenon's novel *Maigret and the Wine-merchant* – to consider the alternative view that writing can exist without using analogy at all.

Writing

There are five writing activities:

Activity 14.1

- Using unusual words in a modern context – to test whether they can add force and idiosyncrasy to your writing.

Activity 14.3

- Creating analogies by looking at pictures of unusual occupations, or occupations superseded by modern technology – to practise looking for visual correspondences.

Activity 14.7

- Writing a description of three characters, from different age groups, and using as extravagant analogies as you can – and then revisiting your work after a day or two.

Activity 14.8

- Creating an image which defines one member of a group (small or large) as the ‘odd-one-out’, creating in the process a kind of whole analogy.

Activity 14.10

- Experimenting with adding analogies to a passage by Simenon – to test Simenon’s argument that good writing is shorn of expressive language and analogy. Do not be afraid of taking this too far. The point of the exercise is to get you to debate at what point expressive language and analogy overpower writing.

In all these exercises, it is important to let yourself relish analogy, even take it to extremes. It would be a good idea to share your analogies with others – not for approval, but simply to see if they actually work. As is noted in the chapter, a barrage of analogies, one after the other, can sometimes be very confusing to a reader. The aim is to excite not overpower the reader.

Activity timings

The following timings are intended as a general guide:

Activity 14.1	Writing	20 minutes
Activity 14.2	Reading	30 minutes
Activity 14.3	Writing	40 minutes
Activity 14.4	Reading	10 minutes
Activity 14.5	Reading	10 minutes

Activity 14.6	Reading	30 minutes
Activity 14.7	Writing	40 minutes
Activity 14.8	Writing	40 minutes
Activity 14.9	Reading	20 minutes
Activity 14.10	Reading and writing	40 minutes

Listening

CD3 *Research, Structure and Style*, Tracks 5, 7, 10 and 11: poet Ian McMillan and novelists Liz Jensen and Hilary Mantel talking to Bill Greenwell about their use of simile and metaphor.

During the interview (Track 11) Mantel reads from her novel *Vacant Possession*, an extract that contains some striking similes. Note that McMillan reads 'Branwell Brontë is Reincarnated as a Vest' on Track 6 – the poem is discussed in this week's chapter in the Handbook.

Questions to think about while you listen

- Do you think that the similes used are decorative, or do they have a more important part to play in the writing discussed by McMillan, Jensen and Mantel?
- McMillan says he only realised that 'Flat Bull' contained so many references to 'flatness' after he had finished writing the poem. What does that suggest about the writer's state of consciousness while in the process of writing?
- Why is it less common to find unusual similes in passages of dialogue?

Forum

Here are some suggestions for group discussion:

- Share metaphors and similes with one another, both from your reading and from your writing.
- Post responses to the extracts from Proulx's story 'In the Pit'. Are you amazed by her analogies or are you allergic to them? Do they inhibit your reading, or enhance it? Can we read a piece because we enjoy the style as much as, or even more than, the content? These would be useful discussions to have.

TMA and ECA preparation

This week you may find it useful to:

- Continue thinking about the two major writing projects on which you are engaged – TMA 05 and your ECA project.

- Work on the idea for your ECA project. You will note that there is no writing week for TMA 04. Follow the guidance in the Assessment Booklet carefully.
- Keep generating ideas for TMA 05. You need to make sure that you are not replicating your plans for TMA 05 in your ECA outline proposal.

Useful resources

- B.R. Myers' 1998 polemic, *A Reader's Manifesto: An attack on the growing pretentiousness of American literary prose*, criticises Proulx, among others, for confusing the reader. The book originated in a much shorter article of the same name, in *The Atlantic* magazine. It was a source of controversy, and one well-known rebuttal occurred in the magazine *Complete Review Quarterly*. The two articles are useful for debating some of the arguments and counter-arguments in Chapter 14, and for thinking about your own approach to analogy. Look on the A363 website for links to both articles.
- There are several useful references to simile and metaphor in the A215 Workbook, for instance on p.50, when Derek Neale discusses the need for appropriate metaphors and similes; in the 'Martian' poem by Craig Raine, 'A Free Translation', quoted on pp.217–19; and in Reading 29, in which poet Vicki Feaver discusses her use of simile and metaphor.
- Check the A363 website for any useful links and extra items.

Week 18 Poetry: the freedom of form

Themes for the week

- Understanding how four poetic forms work;
- Developing strategies for approaching the forms;
- Considering how appropriate the forms might be for different subjects;
- Seeing in what ways the forms can be varied, or even subverted.

Schedule of work

This week, you will look at four poetic forms, and explore a paradox. On the one hand, understanding and using the constraints of forms can provide you with the pressure, pleasure and inspiration that comes from the discipline of craft. On the other hand, there is scope for invention and imagination in manipulating the forms, and in experimenting with them.

Reading

Chapter 15 of the Handbook, which includes four reading activities:

Activity 15.1

- Two lines of poetry between which you are asked to suggest connections – to think about meaning and form together.

Activity 15.4

- A pantoum by Bill Greenwell ('They say') – to see if you can deduce the rules of the form.

Activity 15.8

- The unrhymed sonnets 'With Her Lips Only' by Robert Graves and 'Poem Not to Be Read at Your Wedding' by Beth Ann Fennelly – to see two different ways in which unrhymed sonnets can be written.

Activity 15.9

- The experimental sonnet 'Fly' by Christopher Reid – to encourage you to think of potential variations to the form.

Writing

There are seven writing activities:

Activity 15.2

- Composing the opening three lines of a villanelle (one of which is given, although you may reject it in favour of another) – to get a sense of how a villanelle's principles work.

Activity 15.3

- Practising writing a villanelle, making sure that the content is chosen so that it is appropriate to the form.

Activity 15.5

- Writing a pantoum, rhymed or unrhymed – to consider which style is best suited to the content.

Activity 15.6

- Choosing six appropriate end-words for a sestina – to gain a sense of what kinds of words are useful in approaching this form.

Activity 15.7

- Trying out the sestina form, and seeing if it is possible to experiment with it.

Activity 15.9

- Drafting suggestions about how you might subvert the sonnet form, and for what reason.

Activity 15.10

- Writing an experimental sonnet – to explore the possibilities of the form.

Activity timings

The following timings are intended as a general guide:

Activity 15.1	Reading	10 minutes
Activity 15.2	Writing	10 minutes
Activity 15.3	Writing	10 minutes
Activity 15.4	Reading	10 minutes
Activity 15.5	Writing	60 minutes
Activity 15.6	Writing	10 minutes
Activity 15.7	Writing	120 minutes
Activity 15.8	Reading	20 minutes
Activity 15.9	Reading and writing	25 minutes
Activity 15.10	Writing	60 minutes

These activities will give you practice in being clear and economical – and in using analogy (metaphor, simile). Poetry gives you a chance, in a very short space, and under formal pressure, to generate images and rhythms that can help you as a prose writer. Experimenting during this week can make you more aware of the rhythms explored in Chapter 13 and the use of analogy in Chapter 14.

Listening

CD3 *Research, Structure and Style*, Tracks 6 and 7: poet Ian McMillan talks to Bill Greenwell about the importance of repetition in poetry, and about the use of pantoums and villanelles to get ‘your thought muscles going, ... your poetry muscles going’. He also talks about the influence of hymns and psalms on his writing.

Questions to think about while you listen

- McMillan talks briefly about the rhythms of prose, for instance in the work of John Cheever. Can attempting the disciplined forms in this chapter help the writing of prose and scripts?
- Sonnets, sestinas and villanelles are constrained by the number of lines used. Can that constraint be put to use in editing prose?

Forum

Here are some suggestions for group discussion:

- Share your attempts at the forms in this chapter with other members of your group.
- Discuss the process of Elizabeth Bishop's 'One Art' and its origin in a series of developing images of loss. She starts with an image of lost keys, and moves on to an image of lost love. Suggest to each other subjects that could be developed in this way, whether in prose or in poetry.

TMA and ECA preparation

This week you may find it useful to:

- Concentrate on refining your ideas for TMA 05. Check in the Assessment Booklet for when it is due.
- Whittle down the choice of genre; start to develop your ideas for the content.
- Think about your strategies – the use of voice, analogy, poetic form, the potential influence of film and dramatic technique on your writing.

Useful resources

- Here are the first lines of five well-known sonnets which can easily be found in anthologies or online. They will give you a flavour of traditional sonnets and give you material with which to experiment, as in the example in the chapter of using 'Upon Westminster Bridge':
 - Edna St Vincent Millay: 'I, being born a woman and distressed'
 - Christina Rossetti: 'Remember me when I am gone away'
 - Elizabeth Barrett Browning: 'How do I love thee? Let me count the ways?'
 - Ernest Dowson: 'With delicate, mad hands, behind his sordid bars'
 - Rupert Brooke: 'If I should die, think only this of me'
- Check the A363 website for any useful links and extra items.

Week 19 Time and timing

Themes for the week

- Understanding the difference between the time used by a story and the time used by a plot;
- Developing strategies for using time in the most effective manner;
- Considering how to condense time;
- Considering the pace and tempo of prose writing.

Schedule of work

This week you will consider the related issues of time, timing, tempo and influencing reading time. You will explore ways of holding your reader by controlling the way in which time passes – and come to understand how you are doing it.

Reading

Chapter 16 of the Handbook, which includes three reading activities:

Activity 16.2

- Three short passages, in which you are asked to consider the use of time – in particular, the period of time covered by the reading.

Activity 16.7

- Reading 30, 'That First Time' by Christopher Coake, comparing its use of time and order with the outline provided to you.

Activity 16.8

- Rereading the opening eleven paragraphs of Reading 3, 'The Fly in the Ointment' by V.S. Pritchett, considering its use of time. This is a story which you looked at in Week 2.

Writing

There are five writing activities:

Activity 16.3

- Composing a short passage of fiction, noting the period taken by the action, and then rewriting the piece so that it covers more time (or less).

Activity 16.4

- Making notes in your notebook about the way in which you might be able to affect the pace at which your reader reads your work.

Activity 16.5

- Devising the outline of three related episodes in a narrative, and making notes about how best to order them so that you make the reader uncertain of what will happen next.

Activity 16.6

- Writing a plan of how you would order the events outlined in the summary of a story provided to you – in other words, how you would use time to plot the story.

Activity 16.9

- Writing an account of an evening in which two people reminisce; and annotating the account to note how time present and time past are used or omitted.

Research

There is one research activity:

Activity 16.1

- Comparing the period of time covered by a piece of writing, of about one thousand words, with how much time is actually described.

The charts in Chapter 16 of the Handbook are intended only to give you a rough and general analysis of the way in which time might be distributed – they aren't meant to be templates for planning your writing. The work you do in this week is investigative, designed to make you more aware, when reading fiction or life writing, of how time is deployed.

Notice that the issue of tempo or pace has already been touched on in three earlier weeks – when you looked at the poem 'Bat' in Week 3, and when you looked at the Liz Jensen passage from *My Dirty Little Book of Stolen Time* and the Hilary Mantel passage from *Fludd* in Week 16. You should also note that in Week 13 you looked at splicing the narrative and cross-cutting, which are forms of organising time.

Activity timings

The following timings are intended as a general guide:

Activity 16.1	Research	30 minutes
Activity 16.2	Reading	10 minutes
Activity 16.3	Writing	60 minutes
Activity 16.4	Writing	25 minutes
Activity 16.5	Writing	30 minutes
Activity 16.6	Writing	45 minutes
Activity 16.7	Reading	120 minutes
Activity 16.8	Reading	20 minutes
Activity 16.9	Writing	70 minutes

Listening

CD3 *Research, Structure and Style*, Tracks 5 and 9: Liz Jensen and Hilary Mantel talking to Bill Greenwell about shifting between two times in their novels, and about the influence of film on a novelist's use of time.

Questions to think about while you listen

- If you are moving from one time to another in a piece of fiction, what advantages might you gain as a writer? How could you exploit the reader having to make the adjustment?
- Mantel talks about readers being accustomed to film narrative and its devices, especially in moving quickly from one scene to another. What examples of fast film narrative – perhaps in adaptations you have seen of stories you have read – can you think of? What can fiction do that a film cannot do, and vice versa?

You will also recall Alan Ayckbourn talking to Derek Neale (CD1 *Writing Plays*, Track 7) about the different effects on audiences of a play set over a short period of time, and a play set over a longer period of time.

Forum

Here are some suggestions for group discussion:

- Share individual and independent reading you have done, particularly of fiction. Suggest any examples that parallel those given in Activity 16.2.
- Compare notes on how you feel Christopher Coake has managed time in 'That First Time', and suggest any other options you think he might have rejected.

TMA and ECA preparation

This week you may find it useful to:

- Continue working towards TMA 05.
- Think about the constraints of length – words or lines, according to the genre you have decided on.
- Check that your draft work, which should now be under way, is taking account of the specified length of the piece of writing.
- Consider how you will use what you have worked on in this part of the Handbook – the influence of film and drama, the use of rhetoric, analogy, form and time.

Useful resources

- On the A363 website Sarah Waters talks about her decision to structure *The Night Watch* so that it moves back in time.

- There is a section on time by Derek Neale in the A215 Workbook, pp.144–52.
- Check the A363 website for any useful links and extra items.

Week 20 Theme and sequence

Themes for the week

- Developing a theme by looking for parallels between one strand of a narrative and another;
- Linking sections of a narrative by common subjects, preoccupations and/or locations;
- Allowing reverberations and echoes to occur in your writing;
- Omitting unnecessary linking material;
- Creating a sequence of poems, passages of fiction or life writing.

Schedule of work

This week you will be thinking about theme, and about letting an image or idea recur when writing in any genre.

Reading

Chapter 17 of the Handbook, which includes three reading activities:

Activity 17.4

- Reading 31, from *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* by Julian Barnes – to consider the parallels between the two passages.

Activity 17.6

- Two poems by Carol Ann Duffy, ‘Ape’ and ‘Boy’. These are to be read together with the poem quoted in Chapter 2 – ‘We Remember Your Childhood Well’. You are asked to think about the relationship between the three poems.

Activity 17.9

- Four consecutive poems from Selima Hill’s sequence *Bunny* – to think about what links the reader has to supply.

Writing

There are six writing activities:

Activity 17.1

- Composing two passages, each about a character who suffers from jealousy or envy.

Activity 17.2

- Composing two passages, in which two characters in a hotel dwell on similar subjects.

Activity 17.3

- Composing two passages, in the first of which you describe the place in which you live as it was fifty years earlier, and in the second of which you imagine what it will be like fifty years in the future. You can use the research from Activity 3.1 in Week 3 to assist you with this.

Activity 17.5

- Writing a passage of life writing that focuses on one of the following themes: regret; desire; escape; guilt; money. You are also asked to make notes on the others.

Activity 17.7

- Drafting ideas for four poems based on the properties of four herbs. There are many online sites dedicated to herbs which you may find useful.

Activity 17.8

- Making notes towards creating a chronological sequence which is made up of fragments, whether in fiction, life writing or poetry.

Activity timings

The following timings are intended as a general guide:

Activity 17.1	Writing	60 minutes
Activity 17.2	Writing	60 minutes
Activity 17.3	Writing	90 minutes
Activity 17.4	Reading	15 minutes
Activity 17.5	Writing	60 minutes
Activity 17.6	Reading	25 minutes
Activity 17.7	Writing	40 minutes
Activity 17.8	Writing	40 minutes
Activity 17.9	Reading	25 minutes

Listening

CD3 *Research, Structure and Style*, Tracks 5 and 7: Ian McMillan and Liz Jensen talking to Bill Greenwell about leaving space for the reader to do some work; and about the process of 'cutting and pasting' two narratives to create a new one.

Questions to think about while you listen

- McMillan says he prefers writing which isn't like a code to be cracked, and praises Selima Hill for her enigmatic quality. How far are you prepared to trust the reader to find, or even create, the links?
- Jensen talks about arriving at the structure of *Ark Baby* by 'cutting and pasting' together two very different stories, in both of which children were asking awkward questions. What potential can you see in your own work for this kind of echo?

Forum

Here are some suggestions for group discussion:

- Share the suggestions you devise for Activities 17.1 and 17.3.
- Share the passages and ideas you have come up with for Activity 17.5.

TMA and ECA preparation

This week you may find it useful to:

- Aim to complete an early draft of TMA 05 – next week, Week 21, is your writing week for TMA 05.
- Consider all the issues of style, structure and technique on which the Handbook has focused. This is the last week in which the Study Guide is related to a chapter in the Handbook.
- Begin to plan the period of independent study which starts in Week 22.

Useful resources

- Look back through your notebook and see if there are ideas which could be developed so that they echo or complement each other.
- Check the A363 website for any useful links and audio items.

Week 21 Writing week

Schedule of work

This week is devoted to writing your TMA 05, although you should also be looking ahead to TMA 06.

There is no Handbook chapter and there are no guided reading or writing activities for this week, though you might like to review Part 3 (Chapters 10–17 of the Handbook and associated readings) for any elements that seem pertinent to your TMA.

Review all the CD tracks and DVD clips.

TMA and ECA preparation

Make sure that your subject suits the given length of the writing you are asked to complete, whether it is fiction, poetry or life writing. As with TMA 01, the word limit should be a powerful influence on the shape and structure of your piece.

When you are reviewing your writing, think about the advice given in Part 3 of the Handbook about style, structure and technique. You will notice that you are expected to incorporate some aspects of this advice in your piece of writing, and this should also be reflected in your commentary. Look back through your notebook on Part 3, and look back over your notes on Part 1 as well.

If you didn't manage to get a draft of your work completed in Week 20, finish it early on this week and put it to one side while you get on with your commentary.

For the commentary, focus on the way you have used some of the advice in Part 3, and any discussions you have had on the forum. You may wish to quote briefly from the chapters and readings in Part 3, or from reading you have done that demonstrates the ideas and techniques you have been studying.

Leave your commentary for a little while, in the same way that you leave your main piece – then return to each in turn, and edit, making sure your writing is sharpened, corrected and presented well.

Check in the Assessment Booklet to find out when TMA 06 – a section from your ECA – is due. By now you should also be thinking ahead, and developing your plans in more detail.

Part 4 Independent study

Week 22 onwards

The period from Week 22 until the submission date for the ECA (see the Assessment Booklet) is a period of independent study during which you have no guided reading, no writing activities and no formal tuition contact with your tutor.

You will be working on one piece of work – your ECA project – during this period of independent study. You will submit a first draft of this for TMA 06 (see the Assessment Booklet for details and submission date). You will receive feedback from your tutor and then produce a final draft of your ECA.

Although there are no guided activities, many of the resources of the course are available to you, to help develop and improve your writing. For instance, you can review any of the CD tracks and DVD film clips that seem relevant to your writing, as well as the text and audio items on the A363 website. You can – and are recommended to – review and revisit any relevant reading activities in the Handbook. You should also look through the writing activities to focus on ones that might help to develop your project.

Your tutor group forum will remain open during the period of independent study and you will be able to post work there and get feedback from your tutor group, as well as being able to discuss any relevant writing methods. The forum can be of great assistance during these particular weeks. At the very least you will be able to clarify with each other any details about which you are uncertain. You can offer each other moral and collegial support during the pressures of writing and submission.

Your tutor will only be checking the forum during this period and not contributing to discussions – otherwise it wouldn't be a period of independent study. Your ECA work will benefit from gradual development and formal feedback from your tutor (on TMA 04 and TMA 06). The feedback your tutor offers on TMA 05 can also feed indirectly into your ECA work. But during this final period you are responsible for the direction of your own research and writing, as befits a writing course at this level. Your tutor might post reminders about deadlines and the availability of materials during these weeks, and may announce how often he or she will be checking the forum. He or she will be available throughout the period of independent study if you hit a crisis or need advice. You can consult with your tutor about short passages, isolated scenes and stanzas, or on more

general structural matters. **But your tutor will not be able to read and comment on whole drafts of your project, either early on during this period or just prior to submission.**

The key moments during this period of independent study are the TMA 06 and ECA submission dates. Scrutinise the instructions and guidance notes for these in the Assessment Booklet. Make sure you know what you have to do. The guidance notes especially will give you specific advice on possible approaches. Try to get early drafts written – of both the creative elements and the commentary – so that you can leave them for a few days and return to them in order to edit and redraft.

Quick reference

Audio-visual contents and credits

CD1 *Writing Plays*

- Track 1 CD introduction with Derek Neale.
- Track 2 Tanika Gupta – on writing dialogue.
- Track 3 Helen Blakeman – on dialect voices.
- Track 4 Alan Ayckbourn – on dialogue, character, time and structure.
- Track 5 Mark Ravenhill – on exposition and contrasting voices.
- Track 6 Actors Lucie Fitchett and Russell Floyd perform then discuss an interview scene involving status.
- Track 7 Alan Ayckbourn – on visual and physical aspects of storytelling on stage.
- Track 8 David Edgar – on dramatic action.
- Track 9 Alan Ayckbourn – on theatre-in-the-round.

The Mark Ravenhill talk was recorded by the BBC.

Angela Hind is the interviewer in Track 6; in all other tracks Derek Neale is the interviewer.

CD produced by Angela Hind, Pier Productions.

Academic adviser – Derek Neale.

CD2 *Radio, Film and Fiction*

- Track 1 CD introduction with Derek Neale.
- Track 2 *Temporary Shelter* (1984) © Rose Tremain, reproduced by permission of Sheil Land Associates. Directed by Kay Patrick. BBC.
- Track 3 *The Veldt* (2007) written by Mike Walker, based on the short story of the same name by Ray Bradbury. Directed by Judith Kampfner. Corporation for Independent Media/BBC.
- Track 4 *Sunday Morning at the Centre of the World* (1999) written by Louis de Bernières. Directed by Kate McCall. BBC.

- Track 5 Jane Rogers – on writing radio drama, featuring extracts from her radio play *Island* (2002) (based on her novel of the same name). Directed by Clive Brill. BBC.
- Track 6 Jane Rogers – on writing screenplays and adapting a novel for television.
- Track 7 Jane Rogers – on using different juxtaposed voices in her fiction.

The interviewer on Tracks 5–7 is Derek Neale.

CD produced by Angela Hind, Pier Productions.

Academic adviser – Derek Neale.

CD3 Research, Structure and Style

- Track 1 CD introduction with Bill Greenwell.
- Track 2 Dorothy Sheridan – on editing diaries.
- Track 3 Liz Jensen – on the origins of her novels.
- Track 4 Liz Jensen – on pleasure and research.
- Track 5 Liz Jensen – on structure, revision, analogy and theme.
- Track 6 Ian McMillan – on the importance of repetition in poetry.
- Track 7 Ian McMillan – on the use of surrealism in his poems.
- Track 8 Hilary Mantel – on how her novels come into being.
- Track 9 Hilary Mantel – on the complex structure of her novels.
- Track 10 Hilary Mantel – on the influence of drama, the use of analogy and the paragraph as a unit of structure.
- Track 11 Hilary Mantel – on the influence of oratory on her fiction.

The interviewer on all tracks is Bill Greenwell.

CD produced by Angela Hind, Pier Productions.

Academic adviser – Bill Greenwell.

DVD Writing for Stage and Film

- Clip 1 *Housewife, 49* (2006) written by Victoria Wood, based on the diaries of Nella Last. Directed by Gavin Millar. © Granada TV.
- Clip 2 *Top Girls* (1996) written by Caryl Churchill. Directed by Max Stafford-Clark. © BBC.
- Clip 3 *The Homecoming* (1973) written by Harold Pinter. Directed by Peter Hall. © 3DD Group.
- Clip 4 *An Angel at My Table* (1990) written by Laura Jones, based on the autobiography by Janet Frame. Directed by Jane Campion. © Hibiscus films. Courtesy of Bridget Ikin, and the New Zealand Film Commission.
- Clip 5 *Short Cuts* (1993) written by Robert Altman and Frank Barhydt, based on the writings of Raymond Carver. Directed by Robert Altman. © Avenues Pictures Productions.
- Clip 6 *The Hours* (2003) written by David Hare, based on the novel by Michael Cunningham. Directed by Stephen Daldry. © Miramax and Paramount.
- Clip 7 *The Piano* (1993) written and directed by Jane Campion. © Australian Film Commission.
- Clip 8 *Notes on a Scandal* (2006) written by Patrick Marber, based on the novel by Zoë Heller. Directed by Richard Eyre. © BBC Films. Courtesy of Twentieth Century Fox. All rights reserved.
- Clip 9 *The Singing Detective* (1986) written by Dennis Potter. Directed by Jon Amiel. © BBC.
- Clip 10 *Mr Wroe's Virgins* (1992) written by Jane Rogers, based on her novel of the same name. Directed by Danny Boyle. © BBC.
- Clip 11 *Her Big Chance* (1987) written by Alan Bennett. Directed by Giles Foster. © BBC.

DVD produced by Angela Hind, Pier Productions.

Academic adviser – Derek Neale.

Troubleshooting: where to get help

There are four main sources of help within The Open University, where you can get advice while you're studying A363:

- your tutor;
- your Regional Centre;
- the OU Computing Helpdesk;
- The Library Helpdesk.

It is also important to be aware of sources of help outside the OU; for example, your computer supplier or your internet service provider (ISP). The advice you're likely to need before the course starts will probably differ from what you'll need after the course has begun.

Before the course starts

If you have difficulty getting access to the internet, you will need to contact your ISP. The OU cannot deal with queries about individual ISPs because they each have their own set-up methods.

If you have problems with your computer, you should contact your computer supplier. You should also let your tutor know. However, your tutor's role is to support the academic material of the course, so you should not expect him or her to solve your technical problems.

During the course

If you are having trouble connecting to the A363 course website, first check that you can access other sites on the internet, for example, by going to a World Wide Web site external to the OU.

If you find that you are unable to connect to any other site, you may have problems with your ISP account. You should therefore contact your ISP about this.

If you can access other sites on the web, but not the A363 site, contact the OU Computing Helpdesk.

If you have problems accessing materials on the course website, accessing your tutor group forum or any of the other OU forums, contact the Computing Helpdesk.

If you have a query about the course materials, post a message to the A363 tutor group forum or send an email to your tutor.

If you have a query about OU procedures, contact your tutor or Regional Centre.

If you have difficulty submitting an assignment via the eTMA system, contact the Computing Helpdesk.

There is also a frequently asked questions (FAQ) list that you can consult. We have tried to anticipate the kinds of problems you may encounter and provide answers in advance. This list can be found in the A363 FAQ online forum.

The Computing Helpdesk

The OU offers a telephone helpdesk dealing with technical computing queries to all students currently studying a course with a computing element. **The Computing Helpdesk contact details (phone number and email) are provided on the Online Applications CD-ROM**, which also contains the software you need to access the forums and other useful programmes. The Helpdesk staff can provide you with help on installing and running OU-provided software on your computer, and they can also sometimes help with basic use of software and software errors. Many of the OU's networked computing services require the use of an OU computing username (OUCU) and password, and the Helpdesk can also assist with username and/or password problems.

Once you are successfully up and running, there is much helpful information and details of where to get further technical help in the Computing Guide, which is available online from your StudentHome page and also on the Online Applications CD-ROM.

Library help and support

The Library Helpdesk is available seven days a week to answer any queries you might have about finding and using information. You can contact the Helpdesk in a number of ways:

- telephone: +44 (0)1908 659001;
- email: lib-help@open.ac.uk;
- web enquiry form: click on 'Get Help' from any Library web page;
- web chat: click on 'Get Help' from any Library web page and choose 'Librarians On Call'.

